

Manufactured Savagery

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Manufactured Savagery

by [Nerve Itch](#)

Summary

There's a tangible shift in the flavour of the air; through the particles of sweat, of petrol from the motorbikes skimming past the Cartagena docks, and through the hum of people filtering through the evening, there's a fresh tang. Hannibal retreats into the shadows cast by crates, unnoticeable. He inhales.

This new scent brings to mind the sharpness of freshly cut cattle throats, for a second.

And then the scent becomes a melody; something familiar, visceral, and something that Hannibal has come to appreciate as only his.

Oh, Will.

Or: Hannibal misses seeing Will in distress, and finds increasingly creative ways to address this.

1: Cartagena

Chapter Notes

Welcome!

Please be warned that for all this plays with notions of BDSM, it strays far from safe and sane territory (largely at Will's expense, and almost entirely at Will's request).

The story was started back in 2015 and suffered an accidental hiatus, and then a more recent accidental deletion of most of the un-posted content. The whole story has now been written (and re-written), so updates should be more regular.

Enjoy!

There's a tangible shift in the flavour of the air; through the particles of sweat, of petrol from the motorbikes skimming past the Cartagena docks, and through the hum of people filtering through the evening, there's a fresh tang. Hannibal retreats into the shadows cast by crates, unnoticeable. He inhales.

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There's too much noise to decipher the full story being told by this new scent; the only voices that carry are shouting instructions for loading cargo, arguing prices and timescales, laughter. There's no audible accompaniment of threats or pleas to join the scent of blood and panicked sweat. Not enough clues to establish the magnitude of risk, and Hannibal feels a tug of something inconvenient at some internal clutch of muscle that all of his surgical knowledge can't quite identify.

He's not one to encourage coddling. Will should be smart enough not to need his help. Although, Hannibal reasons, it was his fear that Will may be acting recklessly that led him to following him through the shadows at the turn of the evening. Hannibal's concern does not extend to remorse for goading Will to leave in the first place.

He ambles closer to the source of the smell. The handful of people nearby are too preoccupied to pay him notice as he navigates through the crates and trollies until the shadows grow taller and the unmistakable sound of air being punched out of lungs hits his ears.

The sound pulls the smallest of smiles to his face.

Oh, Will.

It's five silent strides until there's a view of the source of the noise, and the blood-thick scent of struggle honeys Hannibal's nostrils.

Will – *his* Will – is curved backwards across the railings. He's flanked on either side, and he's grappling with an arm tugging his head back from the hair. Hannibal knows he shouldn't enjoy the sight of the way Will's throat looks stretched, highlighted in blue beneath flashlights. *Shouldn't*. The concepts of *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts* often sit counter to the impulses he feels in regard to Will, and so he discards the accompanying guilt that they might bring. The second man is pressed close to Will, legs pinning him to the metal of the railing, and he's burying the barrel of a gun into Will's open mouth. It would be vulgar, the threat, if it weren't so...evocative. Hannibal finds himself reviewing his distaste for firearms as Will tries to speak around it.

Only vowel sounds carry, and the man holding the gun speaks, impatience and frustration speeding up the words, the English sounding frantic through the lilt of the local accent.

"Who sent you?"

Hannibal watches Will relax his grasp on the first man, sees the minute shift into a poise which looks like defeat to those unfamiliar with Will's nuances. Hannibal recognises it as the precursor to attack.

It's quick, when it comes, but it's clumsy. Hannibal finds himself critiquing the lack of technique as Will grabs at the gun, jerking his head further back and elbowing the second man in the face. He's leaving himself too open to retaliation. Hannibal's criticism is validated; the second man swings the gun at Will's temple, splitting skin and adding to the hum of blood in the air as red splays across the strained contours of Will's face.

"You won't shoot me" Will says, and there's blood in his mouth; thin, now, mixed with saliva. From an earlier blow, it seems. Hannibal feels a pang of jealousy that he hadn't been present to witness it. "They'll count your bullets."

Hannibal switches to pride; he hadn't yet noticed the clues that the men belonged to law enforcement. Off-duty Polícia with on duty weapons. He finds himself wondering how much Will knew; if he'd hunted these men simply because Hannibal suggested it was necessary for their safety, or if he'd merely stumbled into an altercation out of spite for his circumstances. The admiration he feels continues as he watches Will folding onto the concrete, knees taking the brunt of his weight. There's a smear of red trailing from the trouser fabric of Will's left leg, and Hannibal is trying to form a picture of the wound that might have caused it. He watches as Will is kicked in the gut, hard and heavy, and as the first man flicks a knife open – Will's knife – Hannibal feels his pulse starting to quicken.

He's missed the thrill of this.

"Tell me sent you," demands the second man, and he sounds more desperate than angry. A man with too many enemies to trust in the anonymity of this one. Will's breathing sounds weighted as he spits out an answer.

“None of them.”

“Then you have no protection,” the first man says, and he’s resting a foot on Will’s head, pressing the scarred side of his face to the ground.

“Why’re you here?” asks the second man, and he’s crouched on the ground, tucking the gun away, instead holding the knife uncomfortably close to Will’s face. Hannibal isn’t impressed; the stranger has both shown his hand and folded in the same gesture. He won’t kill Will, and already there’s a dampening of the thrilling surge. A knife, in hands so uncertain...it would only mar, not devastate. The threat, though real, has lost some of its orchestral viscera. Hannibal looks on, reassured and disappointed in unequal measures, though a little unclear on where the balance tips.

Will’s arms are clutching at his stomach, and he’s curled, foetal. He looks vulnerable to anyone who doesn’t know him, doesn’t see the specific tics and twitches of the ruses he employs to overcome those who threaten them.

The first man murmurs something too quiet to be audible to the shadows, and he’s surveying the spaces around them.

“Self preservation,” offers Will as a delayed answer, and he’s unfurling; his hands creeping underneath him in order to gain leverage to push himself up, his knees bending to kick out.

Hannibal sees the inevitability of failure before it happens.

Will twists away, but the weight on his head hinders the movement. The knife catches the palm of his hand as he swats. He’s still trying to grab the weapon, and as the blade cuts into Will’s hand, Hannibal finds himself captivated at the way Will doesn’t shy away from the pain. Will’s safety, literally on a knife’s edge, and Will’s holding onto the wrong end of it. It’s the kind of poetry that Hannibal’s been missing.

“Tell me why you’re here, or you go in the water.”

Will bites at the arm holding the knife, a fierce and feral incision that breaks skin and pulls a scream out of the injured man. The handle slips into Will’s hands. The next slice made by Will and it’s swift; right across the Policía’s jugular, and the shower it produces is a lurching, spewing thing.

The second man stills; a moment of shock that allows Will to push himself back into the fight, knife aimed at the pulse in the man’s neck. The moment passes without purchase; the second man lunges at Will, a fist curved upwards that catches beneath his jaw, sending Will skull-first towards the ground.

Hannibal is across the silent spaces between them before Will completes the drop. His fingertips are all that slows the impact of bone against concrete, and it’s enough, just. There’s still a thud, and a reflexive bounce, but there’s not the crack that would otherwise have occurred.

The second man is only granted four breaths before Hannibal squeezes the air from his neck, then twists, sharp and impatient.

Some people deserve ornamentation and elevation. This one doesn't. Hannibal lifts his body to the railings and shunts it over the edge. The ripple he forms in the water is legacy enough; undramatic and unseen, with the sound swallowed by the distant workers on the docks. He drags the other; this one leaving red and sputtering in its wake, and sends it over to follow.

They served their purpose, Hannibal supposes. Nothing more.

Hannibal expects Will to be slowed by the blunted impact of his head on the ground, expects some concession to the way his body will need to recover from those injuries bestowed upon him out of his sight, but Will has always been one to counter expectation.

"Home," Will says, standing with some difficulty, a low blooming fury in his eyes.

Will doesn't know the effect of the word, so urgently spoken and taken for granted, but Hannibal feels its impact. *Home*. An ever changing place for them since their fall, never tranquil, but always with the two of them. Will demands *home*, meaning that Will demands the stability, the comfort that Hannibal provides. That Will provides in turn for Hannibal. The two of them entwined in their dependency.

Hannibal threads an arm to rest against Will's side in offer of support.

Stability, Hannibal knows, has never been the best enabler of Will's potential.

They've had a tentative honeymoon of sorts these past few months, and they've healed, enough. If tonight has proved anything to Hannibal, it's that there's a ferocity to their dynamic which has lain dormant through these slow months of convalescence, and that there's no time like the present to reinvigorate it.

Sending Will like a hound after the inconvenient obstacles who seem to threaten them is fine, though it seems too trite an expenditure of their efforts. The corrupt law enforcers of the Colombian docks are poor receptacles for it. He'd do it, if needed. But, Hannibal decides, as he steers Will through the shadows towards his parked motorbike, it's not so much the act of killing that he needs to spark the two of them into profound actions.

It's the accompanying distress.

It's the conflict that twists at Will's morality, and it's the brutality.

He passes Will his helmet and fits the strap of his own, waiting for Will to nod his assent that he's fine for the journey back. It's a small gesture he receives; a tilt of the head as Will climbs onto the back of the bike and snakes his hands across Hannibal's middle. The glisten in Will's eyes is enough to drag a smile to Hannibal's face. It's a shimmering, resentful thing.

Wounded, and wrathful. It's an expression that Hannibal wants seared into the softest ends of his nerves, and it's one that he is determined to pull out of Will again.

“Home” he tells Will, one foot on the pedal and his thoughts speeding into new ways to deconstruct the meaning of the word.

*

Home, for the last few weeks, has been a modestly sized villa in the northern region of Cartagena. The white walls bounce moonlight throughout the interior, and the outdoor pool serves as a mirror for the neons of the city. It’s a beautiful home, for now. Its previous owner, an Emilio Chavez, had been a poor housekeeper, in that he was poorly behaved towards his housekeeper. Emilio had, however, dedicated no small amount of his income to filling his home with extravagantly priced spirits and wines, a detail which both Hannibal and Will were able to appreciate, after.

In this moment, Will is peeling off his motorcycle helmet and is storming towards a bottle of spice-darkened rum on the kitchen counter. It was the only bottle deemed aesthetically acceptable to be displayed in the food preparation area, and Will’s red-crust fingers are gripping it by the neck. He has yet to make eye contact with Hannibal.

“A glass, at least,” Hannibal suggests.

There’s heat radiating from Will, more than any air conditioning could suppress.

Hannibal places his own helmet on the sideboard next to Will’s and looks pointedly at the cupboard behind Will where the glassware is stored.

He doesn’t say, *be civilised*.

Will is rankled, and it’s a delight.

Hannibal flicks the light switch on, illuminating Will's brittle movements as he takes two wine glasses from the cupboard. He looks unwell; milk-skinned and breathing fast and thin; yet still determined to antagonise.

Hannibal imagines that Will is feeling secure enough in their dynamic, confident enough in Hannibal’s affection, that he can kick at the boundaries that hold them both.

So. He’s being deliberately contrary. A small poke at Hannibal’s love of etiquette and consistency, and Hannibal finds himself charmed by it, and thinks of puppies pissing on carpets to get their owner’s attention.

Will pours until both glasses are half full, placing one in front of Hannibal and holding his own by the bulb as he drinks from it with thirst.

Hannibal doesn't say, *be careful, drinking with a head injury*.

Hannibal smiles, and he waits.

Some of the tension drops from Will's shoulders as he downs another inch of the drink. Then a smaller sip, then a wipe of his mouth with the back of his shirt sleeve.

Then, he looks at Hannibal.

The spark in his eyes dims the backdrop of the city panorama by contrast.

"What...what did you *think* would happen?" Will asks, and there's a drawl to his words. It's indignation, and self protection in the way he curls the intonation of his voice as though beckoning the words back to himself after they were spoken.

"I should ask the same of you," offers Hannibal. It's a truthful rebuke; he wants to know *precisely* what spurred Will out to the docks, to the violence that sat there in wait. He could surmise some degree of Will's motivations; knows that he had suggested their temporary idyll was under threat, that Will owed some debt to their safety if he wanted to enjoy the temporary peace they inhabited. He may have hinted at where the threats may have lain, but Hannibal had not gone so far as to identify any specifics. He wants to *know*, and he wants to find new ways to encourage Will to tell him.

"You *knew*."

"You are assuming omnipotence on my part, Will. I cannot claim the honour of it."

Will's eyes narrow, then peer at the wine glass. He refills it before speaking again.

"You posed a conundrum," Will says, carefully. "And you told me how I should solve it."

He looks at Hannibal, and in his gaze there's that buttoned in expression of betrayal, and the distance between the two of them seems immediately too great. Hannibal resists the impulse to close it; to smother it and crush the breath from it. Instead, he waits.

"You expected me to fail."

Hannibal smiles at this; an instinctual response to Will's grudging vulnerability.

"I had no such expectations. I was concerned, Will, that your recklessness may lead you to a path more hazardous than you were equipped to travel."

Will smiles, with teeth, into his drink. There's still red lining his gums, and Hannibal finds himself wondering how the metallic taste will be influencing the flavour of the rum. He wants to taste it.

"*Concerned*."

"I was not wrong," Hannibal says, and he knows it is a cruel thing to say, even before Will's reaction.

The freshly poured drink disappears down Will's throat and the glass in his hands smacks against the sideboard, severing stem from base.

"You *wanted* me to fail," Will says, spittle lining his words as he pushes the glass stem against the skin of Hannibal's neck. "You knew I'd screw up."

Hannibal reaches out a hand to push the improvised weapon away, and is discreetly surprised when the glass presses in. His nerves fizz through his neck as the smallest portion of his skin breaks beneath the pressure.

"So you intend to kill me for coming to your rescue?" Hannibal asks, aware that he has spoken another cruelty, savouring the impact it has on his skin when Will pushes the glass a microdistance further.

Will tenses at the sound of his bluff being called.

"I can't kill you," Will admits, though the glass stem remains in place. "Separation is...a terrifying thing."

Hannibal regards him carefully.

"Do you miss being terrified?" he asks.

"Do *you*?" Will counters. His expression says that he knows he hasn't earned terror from Hannibal, not with this.

"I miss terror," Hannibal answers, and he wraps a hand across Will's tensed wrist, pushing with incrementally growing strength until the glass is at Will's side, away from him. *Safe*.

"I thought, tonight, you wanted rid of me," Will says, softer now. The defeat in his voice tells Hannibal that the pint of rum is starting to dull his caution; he'd never speak so candidly without lubrication.

Hannibal picks each of Will's fingers away from the glass stem until he holds it in his hands.

"I could never be so impersonal with you, Will."

He means it, and as Will shifts forward, he feels rigidity inside Will's trousers as he presses up against him. Behind the inebriation and the inevitable arousal, there's still a tremble that feels like rage, but it's thinning, assuming another form.

"But you wanted..." Will hesitates, eyes widening and all semblance of better judgement leaving him through grabbing, pulsing breaths. "You just wanted to watch me get hurt," he says, and Hannibal feels the way that Will's erection grows as he voices the realisation.

Hannibal holds the glass stem against the scar of Will's cheek, close enough to stroke, but not close enough to cut into the scar kept small by his stitches.

"Of course," Hannibal answers.

Will's fury emerges with a burst that should have been quashed by the injuries of the dockyard altercation. His skin shines with a pallid sweat, and his breath is a rasping thing that doesn't reach the depths of his lungs, but the fight in him is still...remarkable.

Will doesn't say, *you've seen me suffer enough*.

Instead, Will grabs at the open collar of Hannibal's maroon shirt and tugs until buttons split and the force of it angles Hannibal towards the tiled kitchen floor.

"Who am I supposed to be to you," Will says, and it's a challenge, not a question. "You have me," he says, and he's pulling the shirt away, matched by Hannibal pulling the damp fabric from his chest. "You've had more of me than I thought I had to offer anyone."

Hannibal pauses at this; sees the wetness gathered around Will's eyes and bites down the urge to lick at them.

He has, he knows. But Hannibal knows that it was only ever his to take.

"I have only taken what you are willing to give me," Hannibal answers, and he moves his right hand to the tautened cotton of Will's trousers.

He feels his want, his hunger, growing inside him like something primitive.

"And now you want me to give you my...*suffering*," Will says, and his hands are faltering around the waistband of Hannibal's slacks. "More of it."

Hannibal has no defence, and agreement would be insubstantial. He reaches a hand round the back of Will's neck, pulling him towards him. His mouth is open enough only to consume, not devour, but he's pulling Will, and Will folds into it like an answer, and their mouths are hot, hungry, angry, and Will is speaking in that silent, blood-tanged way that Hannibal hasn't tasted since they washed up on shore those months ago.

Hannibal pulls back, for breath. Will fidgets again at the buttons on Hannibal's crotch, and each fumble and jerk pulls a breath into Hannibal's stomach that feels like being winded.

Hannibal lets himself feel vulnerable to Will's touch.

He feels the tremble on his groin as Will's breath, warm and sharp, skims across the swollen head of his cock. He arches off the tile as warm tongue skims his shining, drizzling tip, and he breathes out in frustration as the friction withdraws and Will speaks, low and almost in control.

"Go on, then."

Hannibal's thoughts are slower to gather.

"Will?"

Will is poised, hands splaying Hannibal's thighs and his mouth inches from the strain of his cock, breath hot and now light, shaking.

"You want to. So *do*."

Hannibal doesn't say, *there are too many things I want to do in this moment to pull a single one into clarity*.

Will thumbs indents into the bare skin of Hannibal's legs and his expression is pure murder.

"You want it, so do it. Hurt me."

*

With teeth

Chapter Summary

In which Hannibal attempts creative dentistry.

[I've done a couple of readings of this chapter in public, and on both occasions have given the audience the opportunity to duck out of the room before the reading starts - so it's only fair to offer the same option here! Notes at the end provide a brief summary for those who would like to avoid this]

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal prides himself on the control he holds over himself. His resolve, when set, is a thing of iron. It is not to be bent by anyone. *Unless*. Unless he allows himself the freedom to shuck it.

The freedom of this choice, Hannibal knows, provides him with the messy variables, and the beauty and damage they entail. It also costs him, dearly.

In this moment, his resolve is being gripped by Will through bloodied fingers.

Hannibal's pulse is already thudding, and this is how he knows that his armour doesn't stand a chance.

"Hurt me."

When Will says it, it's not a plea.

It's spoken through gritted teeth, but it's Will's eyes that dismantle the whole concept of self control. Will's eyes are a night sky lit up by explosions, and Hannibal wants to bite them from their sockets.

Hannibal responds without words, pulling at the top of Will's pants and drinking in the melody of the choked grunt from Will's throat. His arms are weaved around Will's as he shoves the fabric down, breaking eye contact for long enough to survey.

Will is straining, his cock flushed and inviting.

Hannibal knows, *knows*, that Will's demand is a play for power, and that anything he does to acquiesce to it may cost him. But his hand is pressed against the side of Will's hip and there's a smudging of crimson against the pallid flesh, of bruising not yet bloomed. It's a taunt, of

sorts. It's something of Will's that doesn't belong to him, yet. And so, he begins to own it, pushing fingers against the skin until it turns white and draws a low hiss from Will.

Will claws back in answer, fingers kneading at the skin on Hannibal's thighs.

It's less of a protest than it is an invitation.

"Will."

Will retracts the grip, and something in the obedience draws a low breath out of Hannibal.

"Have you not s —"

Hannibal's words are stopped by the damp stickiness of Will's hand against his balls, tacky from the blood still congealing on his palm.

Fingers dance up the stem of his cock, light but purposeful.

"Will..."

"This is what we are," Will says, something crackling in his voice. "How we are."

His eyes still read feral, and Hannibal wants, *wants* so much to let Will continue touching him with the deftness he's honed, wants to let those bloodied fingers wring him out right now on the kitchen floor, but he knows he can't. Mustn't. *Shouldn't*.

"Will."

It's almost shouted, and Hannibal is prying Will's hands from him, pushing him back with a shunt. He holds on; makes the impact of Will's back against the tiles a soft one, relatively.

Will is smiling at him, a spiteful smirk with thin red leaking from its seams, and Hannibal fights the urge to smack it from his face. It would be crude, and Will is getting enough delight from his faltering composure already.

Instead, Hannibal wraps a hand around Will's jaw, feels the heat from recently impacted skin beneath his skin, and pushes the fingers from his other hand in. It's less a seductive move than an exploration; if there's blood still leaking from Will's mouth, it would be prudent to identify the cause before they hit a point where caution becomes impossible.

Will's arms grappling against his grip are doing nothing to mute the arousal heating his skin and pulling at him with increasing urgency. Neither is the way that his grip on Will's jaw has his head pinned still, or the way that saliva pools around Hannibal's fingers as he rummages against teeth. And neither is the sound of protracted vowels leaking out of Will, or the clumsy friction of Will's cock against his splayed thighs.

Hannibal finds the source of the leaking red; a tooth that shifts easily under the pressure of his fingertips. Having Will breaking apart beneath him is almost too much, even without the necessary friction, and Hannibal takes a slow, steadying breath to still the pulse weighing heavily against his groin.

“You’re losing a tooth, Will,” he says, and there’s too much breath behind his words for them to sound authoritative. He can hear himself, resonating through the room, and the elation is palpable.

Will’s tongue worries at his fingers, and Hannibal quells it by pushing his index finger deeper, resting against the tonsils until Will retches.

He pulls his hand out, momentarily. Lets the mix of blood and saliva drip from his fingers and onto Will’s face, as though to illustrate the point.

Will makes a sound as though he’s trying to speak, and only coughs. He reaches to wipe the dampness from his face, and then curls his hand towards Hannibal’s cock. As though undoing him gently would be any less violent than fighting him.

Hannibal squeezes at Will’s jaw, tight. *He still has this under control.*

“Will.”

Will’s hands still.

“Lay your hands down at your sides,” Hannibal instructs. A simple command, and yet whether or not Will can follow it will dictate the tone of all that may follow.

Will hesitates, mouth still half held open and the fight in his eyes turning hungry. It takes a shaking breath until Will obeys, laying his hands flat against the floor. He doesn’t flinch when the sliced palm hits the tile, and for a second Hannibal imagines that Will is looking for approval in this. Hannibal doesn’t grant it.

“Turn them over,” Hannibal says, voice low, almost gentle but for the threat weaved through it.

Will does as he’s asked. Told.

Hannibal releases his hold on Will’s jaw, clambering off him enough to pull his trousers fully off.

“Good,” he tells Will. “This may be uncomfortable,” he tells him, straddling Will’s stomach as and savouring the expression of hopefulness in Will’s eyes.

Hannibal positions his knee above the cup of Will’s upturned hand, hovering the joint a fingernail’s width above the sliced skin of Will’s right hand, before leaning his weight into it.

Will shouts out; a reluctant and guilty sound. Hannibal smiles.

“This will hurt,” Hannibal says, leaning over Will’s face and resting his hand back on his jaw. “This is what you wanted?”

Will’s eyes are watering and he blinks once. Hannibal takes it as assent, the feel of Will’s erection teasing his skin offering further validation.

Hannibal reaches his fingers back into Will's mouth, towards the back where the loose tooth shifts at its root. Will is breathing hot and fast, and Hannibal can feel him angling his legs up, tensing and holding himself rigid in anticipation of the inevitable.

Hannibal affords himself a moment to savour; this, he thinks, he will suspend in the halls of his memory palace. The dried blood garlanding Will's face, the desperation and hunger shared by the two of them, the invited cruelty and the *need*, all but writhing beneath him.

Hannibal locks his finger and thumb around the tooth. Will stares up at him, fury and acceptance all held in a wet-eyed blink. He's ready. It takes only a second; a tug, a twist, and a final wrench to pull the loose molar from the jaw.

And then it's there, in his hand. Stringy with spit, and bloody.

Hannibal clenches at it, feels the short prongs of the root digging into his palm, and over the hum of endorphins, he's aware of Will's keening, spitting sounds of distress.

"Jesus *fuck*..."

There's a whitening around the sides of Hannibal's vision and he should have known that this would be more than he could withstand, in the circumstances. He shifts his weight back, still resting on Will's hands and moving close enough to feel himself lightly trapping the tip of Will's cock; damp, now, he notes; beneath him. Hannibal reaches both hands towards himself, still gripping the tooth, and drags the bone against his erection. It's profoundly intimate. And it's Will, splintered and breaking and held tight against him. Then he's spilling, surging, dragging everything out of him as the roots of the tooth play at his sensitized skin. He shudders as the last drizzle falls, his muscles warm and sated.

Focus returns to his vision with a welcome swiftness, and Will is a tensed, coiled stretch of rage under his weight, now painted across his chest with marks more temporary than his scars.

"Incredible boy," Hannibal murmurs, his muscles already sagging where Will's are vibrating beneath him. He strokes at Will's face, at the smears of saliva there, and is slow to recoil when Will bites in the vicinity of his hand.

"Shh."

"Hannibal, *please*..."

It comes out in a slur. This is not the best angle for Will, he knows, with blood pooling to the back of his throat. And yet, the music of the struggle seems a fair trade for caution, for now.

"Was this what you wanted, Will?" Hannibal asks, withdrawing his hand and shifting further back, with purpose. Will twitches beneath him.

"It's what *you* wanted," Will manages.

"If I move, will you keep your hands where they are?" asks Hannibal, voice steady. It's tempting, he thinks, to keep Will in this state; pent up to the point of incoherence, and

immobilised.

Will does not appear to be able to answer, and for a moment, Hannibal fears that more damage was done than intended. It passes, as Will opens his mouth, spits, and answers.

“If I keep my hands still, will you move yours?”

It’s a polite enough request. Reasonable, even, especially in the circumstances.

“Are you in a position to make demands of me?” Hannibal asks instead.

“Would you prefer it if I begged?” Will asks, and it’s acerbic, his voice, as though begging hasn’t infused any of his actions since they got home. It’s something Hannibal will work on, he thinks, but perhaps now is not the time.

“You shouldn’t tempt me,” Hannibal says. “Will you stay?”

“You haven’t answered me,” Will points out, and he’s breathy, desperate, and it’s exquisite.

“Nor you me. It seems we are at an impasse.”

Will shudders, but keeps his hands where they are, clenching them into fists.

Hannibal waits. Three heavy seconds to confirm that Will is going to stay, that he’s not retaliating. Yet.

The instinct to make Will wait has not yet subdued, and with his own desires so fully sated, Hannibal has little motivation to attend to Will beyond reciprocity.

But, courtesy has always held high value to him, and the situation requires some form of resolution.

Will’s eyes in this moment are a plague, and Hannibal is content to let their stare roll over him as he shifts further down, resting his mouth about the smooth shine of the tip of him. He inhales; drinks in sweat and bitterness. *His* scent.

There are questions and accusations still lingering in the air around them, and Hannibal wants, needs to address them, but Will is shifting with grudging eagerness beneath him.

“Ugh, *god*...”

Hannibal folds his mouth around Will’s balls, tastes the saltiness of tension and withdraws; Will’s hips are jerking, pushing him off-balance. Impatient.

That Will’s hands have remained obediently clenched by his side is the only reason that Hannibal obliges him so quickly. He has, he reasons, suffered enough.

Hannibal places a firm hand against the bruising on Will’s hip. Uses his other to touch the base of Will’s cock, with the softest pressure.

The noise Will makes in answer is more of a gurgle than a gasp. *Poor boy.*

Hannibal dips his head again, lapping at Will's cock and feeling the weight of him heavy against his tongue; silken, almost, and Hannibal thinks he will never tire of the imperceptible changes in the weight and taste of Will when he has him this way. He rolls his tongue against the skin, increases the pressure of his fingers, and then licks a stripe towards the slit. For a moment, he wonders if he should have pressed the tooth into Will's softest skin as he had himself. The moment disintegrates as Will shakes on his tongue, and then Hannibal's mouth is filling, sour yet so beautifully intoxicating, and he's closing his throat around the taste of Will, savouring it.

His hands grip onto Will's hips, and only now does Will allow his hands to move. Hannibal watches them unfurl, and accepts them as they rest gently shaking, onto his shoulders.

"I'm concerned, Will," Hannibal says, his voice soft. "If you make this demand of me, it cannot be good for you." Hannibal pauses, breathes in the scent of the aftermath.

"Yet I have no inclination to deny myself," he adds, a small concession to honesty regarding his impulses. He knows he owes Will this much, at least.

Will hums an agreement, pulling himself up to a sitting position, legs tucked between Hannibal's.

His chest is sticky as he presses up against Hannibal.

"I don't expect you to deny it," Will answers. "It's why I asked."

The air is thick between them, and Will has the expression of one who will not divulge his secrets without drastic persuasion.

"Am I to know what sparked the change?" he asks, knowing that no answer Will gives will be free from cryptic misdirection.

"It's less a *change* than it is a progression," Will says, his mouth is moving stiffly.

Hannibal decides that right now, some form of clean up is a more pressing and productive use of their time, and will be easier than siphoning admissions out of Will. He nods to show that he understands, and moves to gather their weighted, sticky bodies from the floor. He threads an arm under the bend of Will's knees, still trapped in rumpled fabric, and another across his back, tucking his hands beneath Will's armpit until he can lift him bodily.

He's an easy weight to carry, and holding him like this, with his muscles softening in his grip, Hannibal feels a swell in him which reaches deeper than any biological response. *His.*

Will smiles, loose and as close to content as he ever allows himself to be, with Hannibal.

"I think," Will offers, as Hannibal steps over the threshold to the white bathroom, "That I wanted to remind myself."

Hannibal dips, resting him on the floor, stroking at his hair and untangling the blood-cracked tendrils of curls.

“Remind yourself of what, Will?”

Hannibal twists on the taps, testing the temperature of the water. His own cleanliness is pressing, but he’d rather address Will’s damages before he allows himself the luxury of relaxation.

Will shakes his trousers off, smiles up at Hannibal.

“Remind myself of the monster we are.”

He looks satisfied as he says it, as though it’s a truth which comforts him to the bones.

Hannibal turns from him to hide the smile that colours his very soul in this moment.

His.

Chapter End Notes

A very condensed summary:

Acting on Will's invitation to hurt him, Hannibal does - with very little mercy. Though Will is very visibly distressed, he's also painfully turned on by it - embracing it as the natural progression of their shared brutality.

Hannibal warns that Will's demands are potentially a danger to him, but also that he does not wish to deny himself the fruits of his suffering. Will reassures him that he knows exactly what he is asking, and as they both are spent, Hannibal carries him to the bathroom to clean up.

A kind of nurturing

Chapter Summary

In which Will takes a bath.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The calm that settles in the bathroom is more than simple contentedness. The water hums with Hannibal's fingers dipping through its surface as he washes at Will's skin. The overhead light has been dimmed, and candles now line the foot of the tub, flickering against the white walls and painting Will as a slowly moving Caravaggio. The smell of blood is gradually giving way to the cedar of the candlewax, the sage of the bath oil, and the lingering afterglow of sex. Hannibal is slow to wash the remnants of it from Will's chest, seeing the cracking substance as something akin to a brand. Crude, perhaps, but not unpleasant.

The greatest source of calm in this room is the smile on Will's face; a small and easy thing that shows more in his downturned eyes than in his mouth. He presents no resistance to Hannibal's insistence on cleaning him, and seems to welcome the intimacy. No small amount of his demeanour has been loosened by the tumbler of rum which he discreetly gargles at short intervals, having argued that it was a swifter and more pleasant steriliser of the fresh hole in his gums than any other solution. Hannibal had disagreed, pointing out the sugar as an irritant, and he'd started to talk of the dangers of thinning the blood when it should be left to clot undisturbed, but Will had kissed him then; short, just a press of lips and the briefest sharing of a breath, no teeth; and Hannibal had quietened and hastened to fetch the drink.

Their touches may have become more frequent these last months, but they are no less precious for it. Though they often seem infused with motive, with caution, or both, they are gradually being twined through their daily interactions, and Hannibal believes that by now, they must have laid down roots.

Hannibal is also learning to appreciate the way that Will is expanding his means and methods of influence.

"This looks worrisome, Will," Hannibal says, keeping the tone and timbre of his voice gentle as he lifts a cloth to the cut in Will's leg. "It seems deep."

"It's not."

Will answers with the tone of someone acclimatised to assessing the depths and severity of the wounds gracing his flesh. And already, the tender peace of the bathroom is growing

brittle.

Hannibal pads at the cut, frowning. Thin swirls of orange leak from the sliced lips of skin. It may not be deep, he concedes, but its placement; into the meat of the calf muscle, sideways; will be something of an obstacle to fast movement as it heals.

Pragmatism dictates that they will have to avoid unnecessary altercations for the time being. Which means that Hannibal will need to learn the intricacies of Will's evening's interactions with the Polícia; a militarised police force, no matter how rife with corruption, is no welcome adversary if either of them are below par. The questions Hannibal needs to ask will require more coherence than he trusts Will to have in this moment, though he is reluctant to permit too much time to pass before he can pull all the details from him. Not least because when Will has unshared information, he has power. Hannibal has no desire to be disadvantaged.

Pragmatism is fast becoming secondary to a more urgent sensation vibrating through Hannibal as he dabs at the wound again, this time with his fingers.

Will flinches, lets out a low hiss.

Hannibal skims the slit of the incision again with his fingertip, gentle, much more gently than he'd like. He's familiar with the feel of opening flesh up beneath his hands, beneath his weapons, but it's always to an end. A precursor to death. And yet this is Will, and death has eluded him repeatedly and now, Hannibal wishes for him to remain safe from its finality.

Whatever his wishes, he still cannot help but acknowledge the urge he feels to press his mouth against the opening, to taste and to disassemble the skin, and to savour every reaction it would bring; the squirming, the gasping, perhaps, the submission, or the fight.

He resists the urges as each of them blooms fresh, and pulls his fingers a short distance away.

So this, for Hannibal, is new; he can savour the breaking, and the risk. And he can aid with the repair. And he finds himself suspended in uncertainty in this moment, with Will's leaking skin so close to the nerves tingling the ends of his fingers. To revel more thoroughly in the breaking, or to nurture. To heal. To remind himself that he is not the only person present in this room, and though Will has offered him invitation to do damage, he would favour a more explicit mutuality to anything that occurs. He moves himself to the head of the bathtub, away from the temptation, and begins massaging Will's hair.

There's a thin hum of appreciation from Will.

This pulls a smile to Hannibal's face before he's aware of his own enjoyment, and this, he thinks, is the reaction he should pay more heed to; the instinctive desire to craft a world in which he coexists with Will as something akin to a partner, not a puzzle nor a threat.

This is also the instinct which will see him laid at his barest. He'll work with that, he thinks.

On Hannibal's prompt, Will shifts himself further down the bathtub, allowing his head to be momentarily submerged beneath the water to pull the shampoo from his hair. Hannibal imagines this as a fresh baptism, of sorts. He watches the water cascading across Will's arms

and his still pale chest, as he pulls himself up and for a second, Will looks like something holy.

Hannibal thinks of how to render the image in pencil, and decides that no gallery would be fit to hold the image.

A second later, and Will is shaking his head in that doglike fashion that Hannibal has yet to dissuade him from, and is pushing himself out of the tub gracelessly.

So. That's the poetry of that over, then.

The spray of water hisses as it lands in the well of one of the candles, and though Will still looks content, his posture is faintly guarded as he reaches for a towel.

At some point in these last minutes, a quiet distance has stretched between them, and Hannibal cannot think of the words which could close it.

Hannibal rushes to pass him a dry flannel before he can colour the towel with blood from his legs, and watches Will intently as he plucks the medical tin from the cabinet and dabs antiseptic around the cut. There's no reverence in the way Will cleans and then dresses the wound with gauze; it's methodical, as regular as brushing teeth. It's an opportunity wasted, Hannibal thinks.

"How is your mouth?" he asks Will, unplugging the bath. He tries to sound caring, unsure if that would be believed, coming from his mouth. He hopes that it could be.

"Sore."

There's no resentment in the way Will says it, nor any demand for sympathy.

It simply is, just as the two of them simply *are*.

Will wraps the towel around himself and reaches for the tumbler of rum which almost certainly now has bathwater in it.

"I'm...exhausted," Will says, padding across the tiles to the door, and not to Hannibal. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight," offers Hannibal reflexively.

As he watches Will walk stiffly across the corridor to their bedroom, Hannibal is left with the distinct awareness that he has not provided any totality of comfort, nor reprieve, for Will. And that, if they are to continue in any way which *is* to their mutual benefits, Hannibal will have to try a little harder. He will need to impose some structure on the way these events play out, and he will need to find a way to close the pockets of emotional distance between himself and Will. They exist out of a need to preserve; for both of them, not just for Will. But Hannibal knows that he can insinuate himself into those small spaces. He also knows that Will should benefit from this; if Will is feeling so jagged as to wish himself torn apart at Hannibal's hands, Hannibal needs to understand Will's needs in a way that he currently cannot.

Hannibal rinses out the bath and begins refilling it as his thoughts race from suggestions of strategy.

A notion pulls at him, something unfamiliar. He dares to hope at the implications it presents to him. But this, at its basest level...it pulls at a level of ravenous affection that he had long assumed was unavailable to one such as himself. He's already been gifted with the psychological bond that has long been proved unbreakable, and for a while he'd felt that it could be enough. And then he tasted the tentative embrace of physicality, a gradually evolving thing with new barriers to disassemble. But this, what Will has suggested...this opens a hunger that Hannibal has never had opportunity to quench with the living.

Brutality and fondness, working in visceral tandem with each other.

He sits in the bathtub, still warm from Will, and closes his eyes.

This, he thinks, could be magnificent.

As long as he doesn't push things too far.

Chapter End Notes

Welp! Thank you for the encouragement, in its many forms! I'm so pleased that people like this awful dynamic, and I'm such a sucker for the somewhat grudging romance that underpins it all. This was a pretty gentle chapter, all things considered, though you can probably tell where this is headed...

And on a practical note: I'm going to be trying very hard to get the next bit up by Friday, as I'll be away from the work computer for 10 days after that, which seems like a very long time. So! Wish me luck, and I'll do my very best.

"Uncharted"

Chapter Summary

In which negotiation is attempted.

When Hannibal wakes, Will is still sleeping; cocooned in the white feather duvet, a thin rivulet of drool clinging to his stubble and pooling on the pillow. It's orange, and as Hannibal's sense of smell awakens, sour. Horribly, nauseatingly sour.

Hannibal allows himself a moment to catalogue the sight and the unfortunate smells that accompany it. The scruff of curls, the flicker behind closed eyelids, the rasped rumbling of snoring from his open mouth, the bedcovers clenched protectively around him.

Will looks more rested than he has in weeks.

The contrast between this Will and the Will he watched biting a chunk out of another man's arm is a vast thing. Hannibal knows which version he prefers, but he delights in each point in the spectrum, even the softest ones.

He rests his nose in Will's hair, allows the smell of sage shampoo to block the tang of infection in the air. Just for a moment.

Will shifts, then, a halt in his breathing and the smallest adjustment to his clutch on the duvet.

To the kitchen, then.

Will can have his peace, for now.

Hannibal waits until Will has adjusted fully to his wakefulness before he broaches any conversational subject more dense than mere pleasantries.

The midday sun beams at the patio and mosquitos clog the air. Hannibal sits beneath the sun umbrella, tablet in hand. Lunch is prepared; a bottle of sparkling elderflower water in a marble cooler on the table, and a modest spread of garlic-infused focaccia, pureed potato with crushed black beans, and rolled prosciutto laid out in a glass-lidded dish.

Will greets him with a noise which is marginally more polite than a grunt.

“I thought some carbohydrates would replenish your strength,” Hannibal offers, folding the lid over the tablet and pouring the fizz into Will’s glass, then his own.

Will nods, sits down with a scrape of his chair, then seems to consider his manners.

“Thanks.”

Hannibal nods in approval, and wonders if this is how Will trained his dogs; stern looks and positive reinforcement.

“Please, help yourself. I do not trust the insect life not to devour our food before we have a chance to savour it.”

Will takes the cue, lifting the lid and picking modest portions from the dish for his own plate. The garlic is, even to Hannibal’s nose, quite pungent. Will sniffs at it as he waits for Hannibal to fill his own plate. There’s something hesitant and intangible between them; a shift in their ever-changing dynamic which requires some form of dissection before it can be embraced. In this moment, however, food takes precedence.

“Please, Will. Eat.”

Will does as he is asked, and for a few moments, there is quiet between them. Will smiles, and it’s more than just the satisfaction of a starch-heavy meal to break his hunger. There’s mischief in it, and Hannibal is wary.

“Is something amusing?”

Hannibal does not mean to sound stern when he says it, and he suspects that Will does not mean to look apologetic in response.

“You’ve made garlic bread,” Will points out.

Hannibal bites back any urge to question the humour of it; it seemed an elegant way to deter the mosquitos from feasting on them, and Hannibal sees no harm in preserving his status as unchallenged head of the food chain. Will’s attempts to denigrate his cuisine by likening it to the boatyard meals of his childhood are seldom welcome, and this is another thing he imagines training Will out of.

For a moment, he envisions doing so by force; with a snap of his arm against the warm flesh of Will’s backside, or perhaps with a tug of a belt wrapped close around the meat of his neck, pulled close enough to stop breath. A fair response to rudeness, Hannibal thinks; if Will’s lungs will only be used for spilling insults, no matter how mild, he could limit how readily they can be used. Hannibal attempts to discard the images now playing in vivid technicolour through the wet membranes of his mind. It’s crude. It comes with tawdry associations that Hannibal had believed himself indifferent to; Will has yielded to him in ways far more devastating than this. And yet, Hannibal feels a phantom pressure on his palms as he

imagines kneading the skin of Will's buttocks, and now there's a hint of tightness to his trousers. This, Hannibal thinks, is inconvenient.

"It's good," Will says with some caution when Hannibal's face fails to register any levity.

Hannibal imagines Will using that cautious voice to navigate his way through the demands Hannibal will make of him, imagines Will seeking to please. It sits uneasily, this version. Like an overlay which bears only passing resemblance to the image beneath. Hannibal replaces it swiftly with thoughts of Will biting back curses, challenging every request, and only conceding when it matches his own desires. This version, Hannibal believes. A sweat is forming on the back of his neck and his stomach feels coiled in loops and he needs, quite urgently, to derail this current freight load of fantasies.

"I need to ask you about last night at the docks," he says by way of distraction.

Will's expression clouds momentarily when Hannibal mentions it. The sort of clouding that preludes a storm, perhaps. Will swallows, takes a sip of the water and his shoulders stiffen. There's that writhing indignation, and Hannibal can almost smell it.

"You were there. You watched it all. What's to ask?"

"Not all," Hannibal says. Defensiveness feels uncomfortable on his tongue. "Enough to know that my intervention was necessary."

Hannibal feels some modicum of control returning to him. Not enough, yet. But his current seated position is becoming marginally more bearable as he concentrates on Will's words, and not the understated force behind them.

"Worried that if I spilled my brains on the concrete there wouldn't be enough left over for you to eat?"

Will doesn't sound snippish when he says it. Thoughtful. Wistful, even. They've come so far, in terms of trust, though some wedges between them seem immovable.

"I had no desire to see you dead, nor to eat you."

"That's not entirely true," answers Will, and he's smiling again, a filth-tinged grin that falls off his face a second later.

"Will."

Self-control appears to be slipping from Hannibal like silk from a glass shelf.

"What did you expect to happen, Hannibal?"

His face is hardened again, scar glistening with sun-formed sweat and eyes glittering in synchronicity with the pool.

Hannibal's voice is steel, now.

“I expected you to navigate your way out of your misguided altercation.”

“*Misguided.*” Will takes another sip of the water and pushes his plate to the side. “*You* guided me there.”

Hannibal can see Will’s point. Admitting it, however, is a concession too far.

“I merely told you we had attracted attention when we were last seen together. I didn’t instruct you to identify the source of that attraction and then allow yourself to be beaten bloody by it.”

Even as he speaks the words, he replays the scents and sensations of Will’s blood-wet skin against his own, and he chides his brain for its lack of cooperation with his need to maintain his own dignity.

“No. No, that was just a lucky side-effect.”

Hannibal finds that his appetite for food has been thoroughly quelled. His hunger, however, has not.

He’s missed this aspect of Will. Pinched-in ferocity, all verbal claws and more than a threat of bite.

“I had hoped our sparring practice would have stood you in more favourable stead against any potential attacker” Hannibal continues. It’s an unkind criticism, he knows; the encounter is not one he would have personally sought unless unavoidable. And, truthfully, he had expected Will to do no more than seek information about the two men who’d seemed so interested in them; to identify their connections, the risk they posed, and whether their passing attentions could have been diverted in ways less outwardly violent. But then, Will has never treated his expectations as things to merely meet.

“You’re baiting me,” Will says, and his stance is changing. It’s a little bolder, the shoulders thrown back as far as the chair will allow, and his chin incrementally higher. “You thrive off my...my *failures.*”

“If you survive them, they are not failures.”

“But you’re willing to take chances with that,” Will says, and there’s an emotional distance as he says it. It tugs at something inside Hannibal, that unidentifiable pull of muscles that sit beyond his stomach, and the sensation is not unlike pain.

“Not at the hands of strangers, no.”

Will swats at the air, fighting off some unseen bug and scratching at his bare arms. He doesn’t answer.

“We have a new life here,” Hannibal says, an attempt at a balm. “Together.”

Will catches his stare, and holds it. Still, he says nothing.

“I need to know if last night’s actions have jeopardised that. If we are to be pursued by more Polícia, or if those men were merely opportunists.”

Will purses his lips, and for a moment looks as though he might provide some answer; some assurance of safety, or an alarm. The moment passes without words, and Will remains, staring, expectant.

“I would not have you torn from me, Will, nor would I accept your destruction at the hands of any other.”

Will sighs at this, a burdened sound. He breaks eye contact and licks his lips before he speaks, slowly and with a calculated lack of venom.

“Just at your hands, then?”

And then Will is looking at Hannibal, through him, into him, and in all the ways that people have only ever gazed at people in poems, and in prose too intense to have anything but a violent end.

Hannibal finds himself winded by the expression.

“You would allow it?” Hannibal asks, through a dry throat and tensed muscles.

“What do you think?”

Hannibal has no answer beyond a dumb acknowledgement. Here, he has Will’s request from the previous night, only now it is spoken with a sober tongue and wide, wet eyes.

“I believed you had made that demand out of wounded spite and adrenaline.”

Hannibal isn’t used to confessing his doubts. He thinks of how his words appear to spilling from him, and then, he thinks just of spilling.

“And yet you acted on it,” Will says, and his voice is infuriatingly calm. If what Will is asking of him requires Hannibal to have control, he imagines that he will find it remarkably difficult to maintain the upper hand. His trousers now feel like a veritable prison, and no volume of sparkling water is pulling the dryness from his mouth. He reaches into his pocket and rides his fingers over the ridges of the tooth nestled there. *His*, now.

“You presented a compelling invitation at the time, if I recall.”

“My words, or my blood?”

Hannibal feels the frown forming on his face before he has time to consider his reaction.

“It’s not an accusation,” Will clarifies, one hand resting on the table. Close enough for Hannibal to reach. “An observation, and a truth about us.”

Hannibal lets go of the tooth, near lightheaded at the prospect of more parts of Will, perhaps less literally, folding into his possession. He draws his hand up to the table and rests it a short

distance from Will's.

"An inevitability of us, I think" Will continues, and he sounds wholly grounded. "We're closer to who we are when we're dancing around our own mortality."

"It's a captivating dance."

Will nods. "Probably the only one we know."

Hannibal's hesitancy reveals itself in his expression again; he doesn't want this to be how they are simply for want of an alternative. He wants it...he *wants it*. He thinks he'd want it however it was offered, but there's that still unfamiliar need for mutuality that reminds him that maybe, Will's wants in this take precedence over his own. It's an unwelcome notion.

Will appears to read him, placing a warm hand over where his is still resting on the table.

His stare is still a liquid, potent thing, and he's gripping Hannibal's fingers.

"I mean it, Hannibal. And that's fine."

The air feels thicker.

"This is somewhat uncharted territory for me, Will," Hannibal volunteers. "We would be wise to establish..."

The sentence remains incomplete as Will's incredulous laugh cuts through all sound.

"You led me to a *torture museum* in Florence."

Will's cheeks are flushed pink as he says it, and Hannibal hopes, quite desperately, that Will is sharing in at least a portion of the physical discomfort that this conversation is generating.

"You had a basement strung with hooks," Will continues, "*you've carved people into sculptures and stitched flesh to flesh*...I don't think you can claim naivety on this one."

Will isn't mentioning the not inconsiderable detail of these examples; that they were features of designs with finality.

"So you wish to see yourself as one of my victims?"

Will doesn't flinch at this. He loosens his grasp on Hannibal's hand, the skin now clammy.

To his eternal credit, he doesn't suggest in any way that he already is.

"No more than I would want to see you as one of mine," he answers.

Hannibal is not wholly reassured by this answer.

Flies are settling on the remains of the uncovered food, and Hannibal is still trying to slow the hard pulse still toying at his groin. Will, despite his flushed cheeks and scratch to his voice, is looking infinitely more composed than Hannibal feels.

Establishing the terms of their imminent future seems to require more initiation from Hannibal, though he suspects that Will has far clearer ideas about what he wants than he will ever be persuaded to articulate.

And now, he's imagining finding ways to make Will ask for what he wants.

Oh, he doesn't want Will to be weak in his demands. But he would *love* to hear Will beg.

"Is it an absence of control that you hunger for, Will?"

He hears his voice sound more authoritative than it feels, tempered by the tremble that now runs through him. The corner of Will's mouth twitches. *Interesting.*

"Or is it fear?"

Something darker flickers in Will's gaze at that. An admission, then.

"Perhaps the knowledge that I could take you in any way I see fit, ruin and keep you, hold you powerless until it suits me to grant you reprieve?"

Hannibal isn't sure when he says it that this is what Will wants, but there's a damp sound like the thinnest of gasps that answers him. A fortunate guess.

"The knowledge," Will says, slowly and with a shake in his words, "That you would take delight in it."

Hannibal's pants feel damp and he wants to believe it is only from sweat, but knowledge of his own biology won't entertain the thought.

"We should...establish limits, of some sorts," Hannibal says, somewhat reluctantly.

He narrows his eyes at the scoffing noise Will makes.

"I'm not sure I have any limits that you haven't laid waste to, Hannibal."

Hannibal does not correct Will on the context of such limits; he has no plans to introduce a bone saw to the bedroom, nor gut him for sexual gratification.

Something in the alcoves of Hannibal's mind tries to question those assertions and it takes a long moment to quash it.

"I mean to be serious, Will. These things benefit from a structure, and from there being opportunities for you to protect yourself from unforeseen...outcomes."

"You excel in creating unforeseen outcomes," Will says, and his voice is closer to the pitch of a whisper. His seated stance is almost rigid, and he's chewing on his lip.

"If you present me with no restrictions to what I may do to you," Hannibal says, voice infused with iron, "Then you will have no choice but to suffer the full impact of it all."

Will nods, his tongue flicking to the outside of his mouth, and then a lumpen swallow in his throat.

“I’m not calling you ‘Sir’,” he says, and his voice is barely present, infused with so much want.

“I wouldn’t be so dismissive of the rituals and rites of such interactions, Will.”

Will doesn’t look chastised, not quite, but he bites his lips shut and waits for Hannibal to fill the breathy quiet.

“Not all associations with such proclivities are created solely to cheapen the experience. You may even find some comfort in the structures. And, no. I much prefer my name on your lips than any title.”

Will smiles at this, a slight and gnarled thing.

“‘Uncharted’, Hannibal? Really?”

Hannibal places his hand over where Will’s is fondling the glass, pinning it still. His little finger skims the bone of Will’s wrist, and he holds more firmly, makes a clamp of his hand and savours the way Will tenses, swallows, and accepts the imposed restriction.

“In practice, yes,” Hannibal asserts. “Though not for want of a living subject to indulge such things with.”

“You’ve had plenty of living subjects,” Will says. “You just killed them all.”

Hannibal’s expression hardens, rigid, and he finds himself close to breathlessness with the pressure, so much pressure, close to bursting through him.

“So if I want to remain safe from death...”

Will has a look of mischief again as he speaks, only now it’s glistening in sweat and held in place by the clench in his jaw.

“...I shouldn’t do anything to antagonise you?”

And then there’s a new pressure that Hannibal can’t process, *can’t hold on to*, and as he looks at Will he sees that his other hand is no longer above the table. The realisation matches the uninvited feel of a finger skimming upwards through the fabric of his pants.

“Will...”

And then the touch, still muted by cloth, it reaches the underside of his cock. Just a touch, and a violent smile on Will’s face, and Hannibal spills. It’s a hot, frantic spasm, and it shakes him through to the base of his spine and it’s trapped inside his clothes and it’s filthy and it’s *his*.

There’s so much heat in Hannibal’s face when he speaks, finally, through gritted teeth.

“If we are continuing this trajectory,” he says, faintly breathless and biting back indignity,
“Then an act such as that...”

Will holds his smile. *Insouciant*.

“...Would necessitate some form of punishment, yes?”

Will nods, swallows again in that throat-clenching way.

“Yes,” he answers. “I suppose it would.”

Payback

Chapter Summary

In which Hannibal has his very own interpretation of the concept of 'punishment', and nobody loses any teeth this time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal is keenly aware of how desperately he needs to clean himself. His trousers are already clinging to him in the midday heat, and now they're tacky; congealed with the effects of Will's teasing.

Hannibal is many things in this moment. Proud, certainly. Grudgingly grateful, even, to Will. He also knows that his enthusiastic reaction to Will's goading has removed no small amount of control from his grasp, and this, Hannibal knows, is the thing he must tend to first.

Will is sipping at his water and gazing contemplatively over the panorama of the city. Their home, now. Appearing as a sun tinged paradise, only when viewed from a distance, and only ever on the surface. Hannibal allows him these moments of staring outward whilst he adjusts himself discreetly beneath the table.

"Will," he begins, his plan formulating only as he speaks. "Would you be so kind as to remove the dishes?"

Will's attention returns to Hannibal swiftly, and there's more sweat in his hairline than just the sun's measure. He looks keenly uncomfortable. Payback will be a treat.

"Quickly."

Will pauses before he obeys the instruction. His expression is not yet a readable thing, flitting between hesitancy and appearing to calculate Hannibal's intentions, and something else indiscernible. Hannibal doesn't allow himself a smile in return; for now, getting Will to do his bidding is little more than a practicality. And as Will stands, balancing the plates on one arm and gripping the glass serving dish across his cut palm, Hannibal appreciates the view; Will's trousers are humiliatingly tight around the front of him, and his gait is a stiff and ungainly thing.

It's four delicately arranged paces before Will reaches the door. Hannibal waits until Will's hand is on the white handle until he calls to him.

"Will?"

Will's expression is a soft grimace as he turns to face him.

"Will."

He appears to understand the cue; silence is not becoming. "Hannibal?"

Hannibal offers him a thin slice of a smile. "Will, I would like you to wash those."

Will nods, remembers himself, and offers an acquiescent *yes*.

"And when you are done, I want you to prepare a glass of warm water with salt. Wash your mouth with it. Thoroughly."

Will's arms are unsteady under the weight of the crockery, the mass of it pressing into his injured hand, and Hannibal feels a twinge of something like satisfaction at Will's stoic discomfort.

"I don't wish your mouth to succumb to further infection after the work we did on aiding your last recovery."

Will nods. "Okay."

The memories of the scrabbles through pharmacies for antibiotics before they crossed the first border, of the taste of dying skin, of the fear that their injuries could somehow render them fallible after all they'd survived; these are still fresh, and carry with them a small terror devoid of any thrill. Hannibal is in no rush for either of them to fall prey to any treachery of biology.

Treachery, Hannibal has vowed, is a tool he will carefully whittle until it does his bidding only.

"And, Will?"

Will is through the door now, still some steps from any surface he could rest the plates on. His face is now reading a mild disappointment; this is not the sort of punishment that presents much scope for excitement, though his erection is still pressing visibly through his trouser fabric.

"*Hannibal.*"

"You are not to touch yourself in any way."

Will's jaw is clenched tight as he says that he understands. Hannibal looks away from him, picks up his tablet and feigns indifference to Will's frustration.

It is a full ten minutes until Will emerges from the kitchen, mouth smelling of saline and hand stung with soap. He walks to Hannibal's chair, holding two glasses of something opaque and faintly alcoholic. *Rum*. His gait is less impeded with want, though his expression is still expectant. When Will's hands are within reach of Hannibal, his right one placing the glass in front of the now closed tablet, Hannibal slides his hand around the nearest wrist and holds it, rigid.

"Obedience suits you, I think."

Will bristles. Hannibal can smell the dim aroma of arousal on him, still clinging with some apparent reluctance.

"Did you have something else in mind, Hannibal?"

Hannibal has many, many things in mind. And none of them will be given to Will with any swiftness.

"Of course."

He pulls at Will's wrist, tugging and then twisting it in such a way that Will has no choice but to bend his arm to it, and then as Hannibal pulls his arm lower, reaching his other to hold Will's elbow, Will can only shift his body to follow, until the motion sees him with one knee on the ground.

"Good."

And then Will is on both knees, open mouth temptingly close to Hannibal's messed lap. Hannibal may be feeling a stirring of nerves still not fully recovered, but Will is positively straining inside the confines of his trousers. Hannibal has not yet released his wrist from his grasp.

"My trousers are becoming uncomfortable, Will."

Will licks at his lips with a lack of self-awareness and moves his left hand up to Hannibal's waist. There's hope in his eyes, as though if he performs to expectations, he'll be granted his reward. Hannibal uses his free hand to swat Will's away.

"With your teeth, I think."

Will nods, hisses out a *yes*, and approaches the challenge with the determination of one who has no desire to fall short of any demand made of him. He leans forward, his free hand limp at his side and his right held at an angle behind his back, tight in Hannibal's grasp, the leverage pushing him more fully into the nest of Hannibal's lap. Will's chin nudges against Hannibal's hardening cock through the friction of the fabric, and his teeth clink against the button of his pants.

It's probably kinder, Hannibal thinks, to have his legs parted just so. But as he feels Will's tongue fumbling against the catch of the button hole, feels the heat of his damp breath through his tainted trousers, Hannibal imagines closing his legs like this; shutting Will into

the stiff folds of fabric and counting out the seconds until the pockets of air around Will's nose and mouth emptied and he'd start twitching, fighting his way out of Hannibal's grip. Hannibal eases out a breath as he reminds himself, somewhat sternly, that he is not attempting to kill Will, nor to pressure him to a fight, or scare him unduly. Not now, at least.

There's a tickle against his stomach from Will's nose, below the scarring of the bullet hole, and warm, warmer breath, as Will holds the ridge of Hannibal's trousers against the inside of his front teeth, pushing the button neatly through the hole with his tongue.

Oh.

Teeth find the top of the zipper. Sticky metal slinks across coiled hair, and warm saliva follows the trail to the join of the fabric.

Ohhh.

Hannibal pushes Will into the cove of exposed hair. Breath heats and tempts at Hannibal's groin, and he *can't*. Not yet. Not so soon. He pulls Will off him with a jerk of his wrist, and savours the indignant *ow* from Will's wet mouth.

"I'd ask you," Hannibal says, with a little too much breath, "to remove them fully."

"But?" Will asks, and his mouth is red.

"I fear it would provide a misleading impression of my intentions. This won't be as easy as you may want it to be."

Will looks crushed before he can look angry. Hannibal relinquishes his grip on Will's wrist and is pleased to see the skin looking red and stretched in his wake. Hannibal stands, shuffling the trousers from his hips and stepping out of them with what he hopes is some elegance. He kicks them a little closer to Will's knees, peels his shirt off and drops it next to Will.

"I think a swim is called for," Hannibal says, ignoring the tentative swelling of his groin.

Will makes a move to stand and Hannibal stops him with a hand on his shoulder.

"It's a shame that you will need to spend this time cleaning the filth from my trousers. I think you might have enjoyed it."

Hannibal knows he's being crude. He knows these patterns of behaviour from things he's only read, but he's always been a swift learner and there has never been a more suited subject than his Will.

"Really?"

The way Will says it, it doesn't belong to the patois in Hannibal's head in this moment.

Hannibal raises his hands to Will's hair, climbs his fingers through the tendrils and tugs until Will's neck is arching.

“This is what you were asking for, is it not?” Hannibal is addressing Will’s trousers as he asks.

Will’s tongue creeps out to lick at his lips before he can answer.

“*Yes.*”

It’s a resentful sound.

“Or is it that you don’t wish to be inconvenienced, Will? That you want only to see what I will do for you, and offer nothing in return?”

This is shakier ground. Hannibal has long been hinting that their safety has only been guaranteed because of his more violent proclivities, and his attempts to spur Will into action have been the instigators of their most recent troubles.

Will recognises both edges of the comment, and spares himself a discussion on hypocrisy by agreeing that *yes*, this is what he wants.

“Good,” Hannibal answers with some cheer. “Then you’ll fetch water, detergent and a brush, and you’ll clean them where I can see you.”

Will nods, and this time Hannibal allows him his silence. Hannibal is still faintly regretting his decision not to request that Will lick the garment clean for fear that Will may refuse him, and he isn’t certain that he’d lack sympathy if that were to happen.

“I can trust you to be careful with the fabric, and to keep your hands committed only to their task.”

At this, Hannibal walks to the edge of the pool and lowers himself into the cool water. Will’s frustration is a hot thing at his back, and he needs to be able to temper its effect on him if he is to have any success at steering this day to his own ends.

Hannibal keeps this up long into the afternoon, and beyond it.

Will has cleaned his trousers, and at the point where the mundanity of the task had threatened to kill his arousal in a flurry of soap suds and raw fingertips, Hannibal had praised his fine work, twined a hand beneath Will’s sweat-damp shirt and had tugged minutely at his nipples. There had been no purpose to the gesture, no segue into something meaningful, but the gasp it elicited made it worthwhile. Pain, even softly given, was quite the reward.

Then, he’d asked Will to chop olives and asparagus into fine cubes, and as the frustration at getting the slippery olives to remain still and compliant coaxed swearing to Will’s lips, Hannibal had bitten them closed, for a second. Then, he’d stood behind Will and guided his hands until the green vegetables were sliced into an orderly portion, and he’d pressed himself

close, invasively close, gripped the knife and told Will that he'd be tempted to ask him to test the technique on his own skin if he found him swearing at it again.

Calmness, Hannibal had told him, was his greatest asset in all things.

And Hannibal had watched Will gather his composure, and set him to cleaning the bathroom, only suggesting that he allow himself to piss once he'd fully wilted from the exasperation of scrubbing and chemicals and no contact whatsoever. He'd then waited some moments, surveying the work done by Will on scuffed knees with raw hands, and had suggested that Will test the cleanliness with his tongue. Will had said nothing to that; only shook his head and offered a look so woebegone that Hannibal had to fight an impulse to pick him from the ground and pummel it into something more fully wretched there and then. He hadn't; he'd simply tugged Will upright by his hair and whispered with hot breath in his ear that their shoes needed polishing.

By the time evening turned the sky into a melee of oranges and violets, Will's face was close to a perpetual flush, and his knuckles were clenched near constantly.

So, at seven o'clock, Hannibal decides that perhaps, Will has been toyed with sufficiently. There is fresh linen on the bed they now share, and also on the bed that Will only seldom retreats to. Hannibal has eaten a fine salad, prepared by Will but not shared with him. Will has reluctantly accepted the rationale of remaining hungry; the delicate morsels would only have aggravated the hole in his gums. Will has borne each task with waning grace, pulled only back to obedience by the scant warnings made by Hannibal that he may, at some point, receive some reprieve. That he has not reached for himself is commendable, and Hannibal considers offering this as praise, but decides against it. He does not wish to be premature. Now, Hannibal thinks, Will is surely ready to accept some of the retribution he is so sorely owed.

"Will, you look to be in need of a drink."

Will looks, by now, as though he might collapse.

"And then some," answers Will, and that familiar snipe is creeping back into his voice.

"Something special, I think," Hannibal says. He is able to languish in the comforts of a body that has been gently exercised, rested, fed, and has not been thrown into concrete within the last twenty four hours. Will has not.

"The wine cellar," Hannibal instructs, spoken with the false intonation of a suggestion. "If you wait for me there, I'll help you select something."

Will takes two heavy breaths before he offers verbal acknowledgment. There's a tremble in his legs as he navigates his way down the near vertical steps to the wooden cellar, a whiteness to his knuckles as he clenches them, and yet it's ever tempered by the bloody-minded resilience Hannibal associates with Will, and only Will.

The outhouse is only a few hasty steps from the back door and the entrance to the cellar, and within moments Hannibal is behind its doors, gathering a modest selection of tools from the

gardening implements available to him. It's inelegant, perhaps, and certainly not as hygienic as he would like. But, the situation is growing in urgency for him, and must surely be dire for Will. He has made a promise to him, after all. He pulls twine, secateurs and tape from the shelves of the storeroom, and lifts a length of bamboo cane out of its holder. Two lengths, he decides; it's not a terribly sturdy material, under duress.

Hannibal descends the steps to the cellar with awkward balance, the bamboo clacking against the metal. Will is leaning heavily on the support pillar, eyes closed and heel of his hand warningly close to his tensed groin.

"Please, tell me the floor in here doesn't need cleaning too."

Hannibal smiles, understanding that the only reason Will hasn't sat in either of the chairs before him is out of fear that he'd be asked to stand again.

"No. But it certainly will when we're done."

Will opens his eyes at this, turning to face Hannibal and sheepishly lets his hand fall limp to his side. His eyes round as they catch sight of the objects in Hannibal's hand, and he watches, mute, as Hannibal lays each one on the small table in front of him.

"I did mention that you had earned something of a punishment, did I not?"

"Yes." Will's lips are dry, and his pupils are eclipsing the thin strands of his irises. There's still something discordant in his expression; a dismissal, or a deflection.

"You do not like it to be referred to as such, do you?"

"It sounds...familial," Will says, cautious. "Like this is a routine with boundaries set by things external to us. Traditions. Lessons."

He flushes deeper as he speaks, as though some untapped discomfort has been momentarily set free, and Will speeds his words to clip its wings.

"It's fine," he continues, "but I'm not sure that the concept belongs to us."

Hannibal feels at once chastised for his gaucheness of terminology, and yet somehow elated, quite desperately, at the way Will has spoken such easy intimacy with his fervent use of *us*.

"Then should we talk of repercussions and reconciliations instead?"

"What are you planning to reconcile, Hannibal?"

Even in this underground space, the heat between them has a pulse. It's thick, and quickening, and there is too little touch between them.

"If I discuss it so soon into proceedings, I fear it will rather ruin the effect." Will's smile betrays a small victory, and Hannibal finds himself wanting to smack it from his face. "So, Will, whatever is to happen here, do you wish it to be torment that you inflict upon yourself?"

The victory smile dissipates and Will's skin glistens in the low light. His sweat taints the air, and it's beautiful.

"*Torment* is your area, Hannibal."

"Then you wish to be made to bend to it?"

Hannibal begins picking at the buttons of Will's shirt, pulling the fabric from where it sticks at his skin.

"Asking me to do anything is *making* me do it," Will answers, chest rising rapidly as his shirt is opened and slipped from his shoulders. "It's hormonal blackmail."

Hannibal smiles at the phrase. He disagrees, but Will's stubbornness is a delightful thing.

"But you'd prefer it," Hannibal says, unbuttoning Will's trousers and skittering his fingers across his reddened hips, "if I were to remove that choice completely?"

He expects a comeback of sorts; a refutation, or a pondering of the nature of free will, framed within an observation of the toxicity of their dynamic. What Hannibal does not expect is the breathy *please* that leaks from Will's throat. His cock thickens at the sound.

"Your hands, Will."

Will's eyes are lightning, and he offers his wrists. A length of twine is unravelled from the roll, and Hannibal wraps the coarse string in loops around each wrist in turn, keeping a small width of give in each rotation. He slips his thumb beneath the twine and feels Will's pulse juddering beneath it. He joins the wrists closer, setting them in a prayer-like poise.

"Too tight?" he asks, knowing that it isn't.

"No."

Hannibal thumbs at the cut in Will's palm and feels the icy tremble as it osmotes through the places their skin meets.

"It will chafe if you pull it," Hannibal states, and it sounds like concern but it's meant as a promise.

He's surveying Will's form as it thrums with desperation; the way muscles twitch across his frame, the smudges of discolouration from the previous night at the docks, and the shining lines of scars gifted through circumstances of Hannibal's own making. He imagines reaching his hand into those healed parts, pulling at the insides and drawing them closer to him. He thinks of the tooth in his pocket, and of all the parts of Will he wants to keep, and claim, and dismantle and rebuild inside himself.

And he reminds himself that Will is already *his*, almost whole, still. And that Will is *alive*, and that he wants to keep him this way.

Holding one end of the twine, Hannibal shifts Will's trousers low enough for them to drop fully.

"Step out of your shoes, then turn and face the pillar."

Will's cheeks are scarlet and he seems unable to find words as he obeys.

His wrists are lifted parallel to his eyes; Hannibal is careful not to put too much strain on the shoulder joint which still stiffens with elevation. He loops the string three times round the support pillar, knotting the ends and ensuring that Will is tethered securely, elbows splayed and resting against the concrete pole. Secure, but not close enough that he may gain any friction between his upward curved cock and the cool concrete.

Will's back flexes, clenches, and stills.

"Move your feet further back."

Will does as he is asked, until his back stretches out and his neck hinges forward. He's leaking, already.

Will's back, Hannibal notes, is comparatively unmarked.

"As you are so insistent on discarding the conventions of these things," Hannibal says, and his voice feels slow to emerge from his throat at the sight of Will tensed before him, "we shall not be using safewords."

Will swallows, a wet and thirsty sound.

"And as you wish to perpetuate the notion that you have only ever been doing my bidding, you will receive the full brunt of my whims."

Will is rigid, and Hannibal imagines this pose rendered in marble, immortalised, displayed and revered. There are no others he would trust to feel the radiance of beauty from such a sculpture, and he imagines it again contained within his own halls of memory, private and sacred.

"Unless you wish to concede that you may want to request an out?"

Will hesitates, and Hannibal uses the pause to loosen his own shirt. The heat in the cellar is cloying.

And then, Will says the thing that he really, really shouldn't.

"I trust you."

Hannibal believes he could come at the words alone, and only shields himself from the full immersion of the impact by focusing fully on the task at hand. He lifts one length of the bamboo from the table.

"Foolish boy," he says, and he doesn't mean for it to sound so fond.

The air fills with static as Hannibal raises the thin ridged cane.

“Eyes forward.”

Will blinks once, grits his jaw with a wince, and waits. Three long seconds pass and the silence grows teeth.

Then, there’s a swish, and sharp crackle of impact as the wood hits the skin of Will’s back, inches below his shoulder blade.

There’s a hiss, and nothing more.

Disappointing.

Hannibal swings again; precise, on the other side.

The same hiss, only now with a hum not quite close enough to be a groan.

Promising.

The third swish lands on the outer edges of Will’s thigh, and this time there’s a hint of a keening noise, and it’s still something suppressed.

The fourth lays over it, and already the skin is rising in vivid pink ripples.

“Will?”

Will has his bottom lip between his teeth and his eyes are watering, but he responds only with a nod.

The fifth hits clean across his buttocks, the slap of it hard and vicious. Red spots the surface of the skin, and Hannibal resolves to get more suitable tools for future renditions. It seems too quick to raise damage, this way. This, he thinks, is a thing he would very much like to prolong.

Will’s erection disagrees, still straining against air.

The sixth returns to his thighs, and this time, Will yelps.

“Sorry,” he says in a whisper, though it seems more directed at himself than at Hannibal.

He has bitten a hole in his lip.

Hannibal leans forward, teases the bead of blood with his fingers, and tastes it.

Excellent.

Hannibal kneads at the skin, smoothing fingers over the fresh ridges as they bloom in his wake.

At the ninth swat, aimed at Will's back, the bamboo splits. It's a splinter; not fully severed, yet it renders the end of the cane loose.

Will's breathing is a gravel-tinged thing by the tenth.

The eleventh is swung expertly across the lower portions of Will's back, missing organs but rendering the skin livid. Will's eyes are leaking, now, and his front teeth are painted red.

By the fourteenth, sharp against Will's buttocks, the cane severs.

"Fuck."

The fifteenth is a retaliatory swing; a reaction to the language. The jagged edge of the bamboo has scored a lightning strike into Will's behind, and now he's gasping, grappling for breath.

"Shh. Will."

Hannibal's hands are on Will now, soothing, massaging, then groping at the damaged flesh. The thin beads of red from the fifteenth blow are smeared into the skin and Hannibal sinks momentarily to his knees to lick the taste and colour of it clean.

"You asked me to hurt you," Hannibal says, and he sounds more defensive than he intends to. "Have I hurt you enough, Will?"

There's no comeback about the concepts of 'enough' being inadequate for them. There's only a mucous-wet gasp, and Hannibal thinks he hears the word *yes* leak out with it.

Hannibal stands, moves so that his face is level with Will's. His lack of handkerchief is inconvenient in this moment, and he places his hand on Will's damp jaw, turning his face to him.

"Breathe, Will. I don't want you to bite through your tongue."

Will lets out a whimper, and Hannibal wonders that perhaps this really is sufficient. But then, Will is nothing if not resilient. He strokes again at the tensed arms, and offers a pointless instruction to Will to wait. That he will just be a moment, as he climbs the stairs from the cellar.

He returns only minutes later, cloth in hand, the broken end of the bamboo gathered from the floor.

"Will?"

Will is still trembling, but it's subdued. His eyes are red and his skin is a light cross-hatch of abrasions, and Hannibal finds the decoration lacking, still. He mops at Will's face, carefully and with fondness. Will nods, a grimace. He understands that this is not over.

Hannibal slinks from view as he threads twine through the hollow of the broken end of bamboo. It's not strong enough for its purpose, but it should provide an interim measure. He

ties more string to the loops, creating a harness of sorts, and presents the length of it to Will.

“Bite,” he says, one hand stroking at Will’s hair. The jagged end is just far enough from the centre of the makeshift gag not to cause damage.

Will does as he is told, wrapping his teeth around the pliant wood. The string is looped behind his head, tied off in place and more or less secure.

“If you are not in need of your voice, it seems prudent to protect your mouth from unnecessary risk, wouldn’t you say?”

On another person, this might look dehumanising. As it is, Will looks near feral, bit in mouth and skin flushed with sweat. But there’s a grace to his suffering; something accepting, welcoming, even. Hannibal fights the temptation to curtail the elaborate desecration of Will’s body in favour of savouring it more fully, but he is a creature of many indulgences, and he desires to see him marred more intricately.

“Good,” he says, and Will only lets his head fall back down between his shoulder blades in answer.

Hannibal picks up the second bamboo cane, wields it carefully, then swats it across Will’s shoulders with ecstatic kinesis.

God, he’s missed the power of this.

At the nineteenth stroke, Will’s wrists have turned raw from struggling. By the twenty-second, his breath is coming out in growls.

At the twenty-third, his knees are barely supporting him, and no amount of stroking between the blows is infusing him with the energy to support himself.

By the twenty-fifth, there are rivulets of red from where the impact has broached the flesh of Will’s back.

The twenty-sixth is mis-placed; a finger-width too low, and Will lurches with the nausea of one who has had their kidney pummelled.

Hannibal offers no apology, and Will demands none.

The twenty-seventh re-paints Will’s buttocks; safer, if Hannibal’s aim is being offset by his desire to see Will broken around his hand.

Will is shaking, and tears splash onto the ground beneath him. He’s no longer holding himself upright, and Hannibal scoops an arm around Will’s middle to support him; to rebalance him on his feet until Will steels himself once more.

Hannibal kisses at Will’s back with a softness that doesn’t match his urges. He whispers to Will how precious he looks, how decadent the spill of his skin is. Will trembles, lets Hannibal wipe at his face, and still his cock twitches.

There's a pull of silence before the twenty-eighth. A lull, and a tensing of limbs. When it hits Will's thighs, there's a sound of splintering obscured by a shout.

Hannibal strokes at the cane before he strokes Will, seeking the source of the damage. The length appears to be intact, and it's only the heightened volume of Will's breath that alerts Hannibal to the source of the break. He moves to the pillar, to face Will, where the makeshift gag has been cleaved by Will's teeth and hangs jagged from the string, torn and brittle bamboo worrying the corners of Will's mouth.

"A shame," Hannibal says, and he looks to Will's expression for apology, for fight, but the eyes are some constellation too distant for Hannibal to communicate with. Wherever Will is, it is not fully with him in this moment.

Hannibal pulls the saliva-wet wood and string from Will's mouth, stroking at the tension locked into his jaw.

"Will, come back to me."

Will lets out a groan, spitting drool onto the floor beneath him. The shake in his muscles seems permanent, now. Hannibal mouths loose kisses over Will's shoulders, draping his tongue across the rises and splits of skin and he's holding Will up again, pressing his skin close to him, pulling Will's hips back into his. The cloth separating him from Will is an inconvenient barrier, though Hannibal has not yet finished. Twenty-eight is a number of no import; he could yet make it an even thirty.

Still holding Will by his middle, skimming his fingers to the coils of sweat-damp hair and the shift and rise of Will's erection, Hannibal reaches behind him for the roll of tape.

On such damp skin, he doubts it will have much effect, but he has grown fond of the idea of suppressing Will's sounds. Whilst he remains inarticulate, it seems almost tidy. Necessary, even.

He lets go of Will for long enough to tear a short strip of the broad tape, reaching towards Will's downturned face with a loop of his arms.

"No."

Will backs away from the new semblance of a gag, voice high and unsteady.

Hannibal attempts to push the adhesive closer towards Will's mouth, and he's met with a jerk of the head and a frantic plea to please, *don't*.

This is first thing Will has denied Hannibal since this began, and Hannibal finds himself hesitating. He *wants*...he wants Will in place in all the ways he imagines it. And yet, he does not want Will in that place without willingness. It must be, above all things, Will's choice to accept it.

Will's choice right now is clear in his gasping breaths and panic, and Hannibal scrunches the tape in his hands, allowing it to drop to the floor.

“Very well,” Hannibal says, instead of “sorry.”

Will’s breathing slows, a little, and his erection is still a desperate, straining thing.

“Can you endure more from me, I wonder?”

“Other people,” Will says, voice thick and somewhat detached. “They seek to cosset me. Protect me from the world.”

Hannibal places a hand across Will’s back, feels the heat beneath his fingertips, and waits for these curious words from Will to find their way to some meaning.

“They’ll use me as tool for righteousness,” Will says, his teeth gritting between syllables, “and then try to gentle me, soften me after. As though it could fix something.”

He sounds near delirious, and Hannibal strokes at his flaming skin, still waiting for lucidity from Will which he is no longer sure will be forthcoming.

“I don’t *have* those soft edges they tried to find in me, Hannibal.”

Hannibal thinks this is an admission, or perhaps a justification, but the lack of coherence is proving faintly infuriating. He considers reapplying the gag until Will can pull some structure to his verbal meanderings. He doesn’t. Some cruelties are necessary, but perhaps this one wouldn’t be. Hannibal waits, still, patient. His hand traces a path across Will’s buttocks, between his thighs, and pulls a hiss from Will.

“*You* know where the hard edges are.”

Hannibal thinks he may understand; that Will finally sees the ineptitude of others to fully confront each jagged facet of Will, and of the heavy, violent angles of the world he is now immersed in. The world he *belongs* in.

“I don’t...”

Will pauses, lets breath return to his strained lungs, and twists to try and look at Hannibal. His hair is a sodden mop on his scalp, and his vision is obscured by curls and by sweat.

“I’m with you,” Will says, and he’s heaving inside his skin. “Because you’re not anything soft.”

Hannibal feels momentarily stunned. There’s something else Will appears to want to say, but his breath has sunk back to gasps and Hannibal supposes this has something to do with the way his own fingers are now prying at the tense muscles of Will’s opening.

“Quite,” Hannibal agrees. He emphasises the point, the lack of softness, by withdrawing his hand and unpeeling his trousers, pressing himself against Will.

Will lets out a single syllable of laughter, caught in his throat as Hannibal claws his fingers across the raised welts of his backside.

Hannibal has no further narration to offer Will. He's waited – they've waited – for long enough to experience this, and the inevitability of it makes it no less enticing.

It is with only mild reluctance that Hannibal pushes the length of bamboo away. He has failed, he realises, to bring any form of comfortable lubrication with him, and he daren't leave Will – or himself – without the press of their skin for long enough to remedy his error.

He spits into his hands, feels Will's muscles vibrate at the sound. He wraps the slickness around his own cock, slowly thumbing at the tip of it. Will shifts on his feet, still unsteady in his stance. His wrists, Hannibal observes, are now chafed to dampness from his struggles.

Hannibal spits again, and Will is trying to back towards him, eager, hurting, and smelling purely desperate.

One folded, damp knuckle presses in, barely, and Will's breath goes still.

There are ways in which Hannibal delights in hurting Will, but this one, he thinks, is a thing to be more careful with. He nudges the tip of his cock against Will, the precum gathering there providing some slide to the pressure.

There's texture to Will's breath now, and it carries a soft mantra, *please, please, please*, and Hannibal will be destroyed again by Will if he dares to plea so openly to him.

He uses his claws to stem the noise; scratches hard across the cerise lines of Will's back until the *please* becomes a grinding hiss.

Of all the ways he wants to undo Will, he had not imagined the extent of ecstasy of such a seemingly obvious method.

He pushes the knuckle back into Will, past the reluctance and the instinctive contraction of muscles. He'd loosen him with his tongue if he had either patience or stamina, but fears that he is past the point of attempting either.

Will isn't loose, nor ready.

Will is coiled, keening, pulsing and *hurting*, and all because of Hannibal.

Hannibal is ready. Hannibal is intoxicated, throbbing through every nerve known to him, and he spits once more, fidgeting aggressively with damp fingers until the opening flinches wide enough to accommodate him.

He pushes, and it's slippery, just.

Will's breath has gone silent.

His tip burrows inside, slow. Much slower than he would like.

Will heats around him, and he's simultaneously an invitation and violent rejection in the silent spasms of his muscles.

Hannibal holds them both in place, allows the long moment of adjustment.

Then, he pulls himself backwards, pulling Will with him until Will's balance is held between his toes and his wrists.

He's barely in. He shifts, feels friction which doesn't belong against skin so vulnerable.

He shifts his hands against Will's stomach, fingers splayed between scar and hipbones, and he pulls.

Will closes, presses around him, and as Hannibal shunts in, deeper, Will *screams*.

They freeze, momentarily. Hannibal stretches his fingers into the coils of hair, touches the base of Will's cock and feels the flesh almost spring at his touch.

He pulls back, eases himself halfway out in hot, trapped movements.

"Will?"

"*Fuck.*"

It's all the assent Hannibal needs. He shunts himself back in, fingers gripped solid around Will's hips, and then he grinds; pushes until his balls are squeezed against Will's backside.

There's no intelligible sound from Will, and Hannibal finds himself struck similarly mute by the sensation of tightness, of immersion, of everything Will has become for him.

Hannibal shifts; little more than an adjustment, and the pressure bolts at him just so. Another shift, this one punctuated by a moan, high and pained, and Hannibal is spilling, spitting pressure out of him and his stomach feels loose, now, and he's feeling like he's painted Will from the inside and it feels unparalleled in wonder and yet so utterly decadent as the feeling of wetness squirms around him.

Will is breathing his name, and Hannibal remains where he is, feeling the loss of his own friction.

It is only fair, after such a gift, to be kind in return.

Hannibal reaches his right hand toward Will's cock; the angle prohibiting him any sight of it, but the warmth of it is sticky against his fingers when they reach it.

"Would you scream for me, Will?"

There isn't time for a verbal answer. The pulse beneath Hannibal's fingers is a furious hum, and Will arches on his feet as he shoots like a bursting balloon, spurting liquid well beyond the grasp of Hannibal's hand. The noise he makes is less a scream and more like a call to battle, and as Hannibal solidifies his grasp, chugs his hand up and down Will's shaft to shake the aftermath from him, the sound crumbles into something wretched, hollow.

The quietness cloaks them both as Hannibal pulls himself from Will with ease, folding his arms across Will's chest in a hug. He's pressed into the still-rising welts on Will's skin, and Will says nothing in protest; just accepts the grip of warm arms around him, stilling him from the tremors of his bloodstream.

Hannibal could stay like this for some time; destroyer and protector in one gesture, with Will's heartbeat thudding against him.

Will, however, can probably not. He remains mute but for the sniffled breaths of slow returning feeling. His hands are red inside their twine trappings, with a purpling of the skin that Hannibal knows to be damaging.

Hannibal fumbles for the secateurs, letting go of Will for long enough to pinch the sharp edges of the tools between skin and string. He cuts the loops securing it to the pillar first, using his body as a mast for Will to fall against. Then, he unpicks the tethers on Will's wrists, rubbing at the skin as the twine falls to the floor.

Will is painted in reds and water and livid pink bruises, and for all Hannibal is able to remove all notions of sympathy from his circumstance, he has no urgent need to see Will suffer further.

"We should rest," Hannibal says, his voice no more abrasive than a whisper. "And this is a poor place to do it."

Will nods, reaches his freed arms around Hannibal's and draws him into a loose and breathy kiss. It feels like gratitude, the way his mouth falls across Hannibal's lips, and Hannibal answers it with reluctant brevity.

He guides Will to the metal steps, arranging his hands on the rails and attempting to guide Will up the narrow stairway.

Will tries, once, to raise his leg to the first step, and some unseen spasm shocks him back into stillness. He tries again, leaning more fully on the rails, and again his body fails him. There's no grip to his hands, and his legs move as though rubberised.

"I..."

Hannibal turns Will to him, smothers the words with arms against Will's torn back. He's not seen Will defeated, not in this way, and the surge of pride that swells in Hannibal is possibly misplaced. Will, in this moment, is no longer capable of walking, not up steps, and it required no act of amputation or other permanence.

Hannibal's chest grows warmer as he pulls Will closer into his fold. The steps are too narrow for him to carry Will up them with any gentleness, and he has no desire to spend the rest of the night in the cellar. A compromise, then.

"You don't have to walk, Will, because you don't have to go anywhere."

Will nods, and some of the flush is only now sinking from his skin.

“Stay, here,” Hannibal says, guiding Will back to the open floor, safely away from the spots of dampness. He eases Will down to his knees.

“Lie on your front, for the time being,” Hannibal instructs, and he means it to sound warm, but it’s a brittle sounding command. “I’ll bring you blankets, and water. Rest, Will.”

Will moves himself with some difficulty until he’s lying on his side against the stone, one arm holding his chest elevated from the floor. He has the expression of one who has too many sparks of pain reverberating through him to be able to discern the source of any of them.

“You’ll stay with me?” Will asks, and it’s the first request he’s made in support of his own wellbeing. Hannibal finds it charming, and, he supposes, encouraging.

“I’ll be back, Will.”

Hannibal smiles at Will in a way which he hopes conveys the utter admiration he holds for him, and retreats up the stairs in search of blankets.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this one is being posted late! And, oh dear, Hannibal. I'm sure it's fine and he won't fuck this up or anything.

There would be more notes here but I am stealth-updating this fic from the work computer again...

Gentle plague

Chapter Summary

Hannibal, you *dick*.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will barely responds to the pool of cotton that lands in front of him. He blinks, once. Then, he grimaces, and it's slight, as though the effort to react to his pain is too great a thing to manage. His eyes are puffed, pink and his nostrils flinch and flare in the smallest of increments as he tries to shift position.

Hannibal knows this expression and its range of inflections, though not from Will. It's resignation, and it's the aftermath of agony which transcends the nerves of human reactions. He's seen it on the faces of people who've passed the point of pleas for survival, awaiting the final acts of execution. It's an expression which had always filled him with a soft disappointment; confirmation that the life he was snuffing out was indeed unremarkable. And yet, on Will, it looks beautiful.

The distinction, thinks Hannibal, may have something to do with the absence of imminent death.

And then, he's struck by a reaction which is of far more concern to him.

It's an impulse to soothe, and to protect.

It goes far beyond any former need to possess, to cherish, or adore.

The urge reaches deep into him, wraps its wet fingers around the steel of his heart and wrenches at it.

"Water?" asks Will, and his voice, it's so soft, yet devoid of pleading.

The urge has him in his grip now, crushing out the habitual temptation to deny Will the comforts he seeks. He tries to turn his back on this softness which threatens to turn his iron to blood. He shuts his eyes, sees himself pick up the cane and imagines a fresh assault against the stinging, raised skin of Will's back. Imagines the skin shredded until the man inside it is little more than an apology, bathed in blood and no longer any threat to his own control.

Hannibal shudders.

Perhaps not.

Will accepts the water when it comes, spills it down his chin and makes no move to dry it.

Hannibal finds that he doesn't even resent the lack of decorum.

He's made concessions to his newfound compassion, and lots of them. If he stays with Will now, tonight, and tries to ease some of the wound from those damp, pink, eyes, Hannibal imagines that it would foster in him some irrevocable change. *He mustn't*. He is a mountain of strength, of will and ire and immovable force, and he has been chipped at too deeply already. Knowing that Will wanted this, that he demanded it, holds no sway over his newfound desire to cosset. To heal. To *fix*. It's a desire that should not belong in Hannibal's skin and he wishes it out, to allow himself the familiarity of carnage and adoration back in its place.

His callousness feels insincere when he stands to leave.

"Don't you *dare*," says Will.

Hannibal doesn't say, *you've been left in worse states than this*.

Hannibal only says, "We'll apply balm to that in the morning." And then, "Rest, Will."

He drapes one of the thinner sheets of cotton over Will's back, places the water bottle within reach, gifts a gentle kiss to Will's sweat-drenched hair, and then leaves, taking the ruins of his conscience with him.

"You're the worst thing to happen to me," Will says. What he lacks in movement and volume, he compensates for in the way that his reproachful eyes scorch the air following Hannibal's footsteps.

It is only a night, Hannibal reasons as he shuts the door to the cellar. And Will has endured far, far worse.

*

Sleep, for Hannibal, is a swift and heavy thing, aided by soft bedding and only a hint of exhaustion to speed the close of heavy eyelids. And tonight, somewhat unwelcomely, sleep gifts Hannibal with dreams.

He navigates the landscapes of his sleeping consciousness, finding himself outside the home of his childhood, and even through the unreality of it, Hannibal knows that he does not wish to be here. A figure blooms through the undergrowth, too tall to be Mischa, and for this, Hannibal is grateful. He has gone to many lengths to avoid meeting her here. The figure is bathed in blackness, a creature of tendrils and coils. Hannibal hopes, faintly, that it may yet be Chiyoh; carrying some graceful admonishment, or steel-tipped guidance.

And then the figure shows its teeth, one of them missing, and Hannibal knows that his sleeping mind will provide him with no fortress in which he can hide from this new plague.

This incarnation of Will moving through the shadows has none of the vulnerability of its living counterpart, and Hannibal supposes that this is fitting; there should exist some version of Will that has not yet been ruined.

Hannibal tries to speak to it; to test whether his voice could still yield some influence. His voice is clogged, and then, his voice becomes mud. His Will is atop him, tendrils reaching from his skin towards him, and Hannibal understands that in this moment, he is the ground on which Will stands. His form is earth and clay, and Will is reaching through him, moulding and sculpting and embedding himself into the malleable dirt. Hannibal is trying to sever the threads of roots, trying to twist each of them off to remain clear of Will's presence, and it's to no avail. Each attempt to push away results in the roots burrowing deeper until he's existing as one with this incarnation of Will.

Hannibal wakes with a dry throat and a gloss of sweat on his skin.

Subtlety, he thinks, is not the most prominent characteristic of his sleeping mind's concoctions.

It is still dark beyond the curtains of his room, and though he feels some troublesome need to resolve the fitfulness of his lonely sleep with company, the covers of his bed are still moulded to his form. This is favourable, still, to the stone floor and wooden walls of the cellar and its tang of blood and spit.

And so, Hannibal permits himself sleep once again, and hopes that his mind will be quieter until daylight.

*

When Hannibal next wakes, it is to the sound of running water and the scent of wine, sage, piss and fresh blood.

Oh.

He's moving before his eyes have fully opened.

Will.

He pushes on the handle to the shower room, not considering that Will should be owed any debt of privacy when his own concern and curiosity transcends it. Somewhat upsettingly, it's locked. Hannibal isn't sure that the door has ever been locked since they first adopted this house as their own, and this alone is bothersome.

He knocks, twice.

“Will?”

The water from the showerhead roars and splashes, and Hannibal can hear the smatting of wet feet against the tiled floors, and no accompanying answer.

He attempts courtesy.

“Will, may I come in?”

The movement of skin seems to pause, though the sound of water does not.

At the continued lack of answer, Hannibal sees no option but to remain where he is, wiping the sleep from his eyes and deciding how best to appease the apparent unpleasant mood that Will is demonstrating by his silence.

Then, he finds himself questioning whether his desire to see Will placated is solely for his own benefit, or whether he remains plagued by these notions of consoling Will from the damage he has wrought.

He is not satisfied by the grudging awareness that his motivations have not been entirely selfish.

“I know you’re still there,” Will calls over the water, and his voice sounds...lower. Slower, even. *Drunk*. Possibly an inevitability of leaving him emotionally wracked and confined to a space filled only with an abundance of alcohol. “I don’t owe you this, Hannibal.”

Hannibal purses his mouth, and accepts that Will is quite possibly right.

“Is there anything you need?” Hannibal asks instead, and isn’t sure if he imagines the sound of Will sucking laughter in through his teeth at his magnanimous offer.

“There was, but it’s passed.”

A chill glides through Hannibal’s gut and he hastily concocts justifications for his decision to leave Will alone the previous night. They sit like insubstantial mockeries of reason, though one seems fit to articulate.

“You sought hard edges from me, Will. Perhaps you overreached yourself?”

There’s a sound of wet knuckles impacting tiles.

“Leave, please.”

There’s a tone of finality to Will’s request, enough that Hannibal does as asked.

Hannibal bites down the frustration and impotence of knowledge that Will is attempting to further damage himself by punching the walls of the bathroom. He has the unavoidable impression that, had he governed his own actions with a little more care, he could have spared himself this unpleasantness. Distraction, he thinks, is the key. And if his memories of last night serve him correctly, the cellar, he imagines, will require some cleaning.

*

It isn't until late morning that Will allows himself to be caught in Hannibal's presence. He's stretched on a lounge next to the pool, basking in the first full sunlight that's fallen on his skin since they arrived in Colombia. The blue of his shorts clashes against the pinks and yellows of his chest, and the ochre of the liquid in his glass compliments the dark shadows beneath his eyes. He's reading from Hannibal's tablet, tilting it to divert the sun's glare.

"Morning."

It comes out as a slur.

There's an indignant kind of anger at Will's dismissal of sobriety, but it's one that Hannibal does not yet feel entitled to articulate. He places a steaming breakfast bowl at Will's side and retreats back into the shade of the sun umbrella. He's spent no small portion of this morning clearing broken glass from the cellar and soaking bloodstains out of cotton, and his arms are still aching from the previous night. He wants Will to at least enjoy some of his breakfast; a bed of pureed apples doused in brandy, topped with creamed oats, nutmeg, cinnamon and clove. He decides not to push it.

"We're still dead," Will tells him, fingers clumsily skimming across the surface of the tablet. "Jack says not to be complacent. But they're not listening to Jack."

Hannibal knows this.

"I like being dead," Will continues, his voice infused with genuine cheer. "No judgement. People are a lot kinder about you when you're not around to correct them with the truth. No one to worry about you when you're dead."

"I'm worried about you, Will."

Will rests the tablet in his lap, and the fresh red scuff marks of his knuckles seem to glow in the sunlight. They're brighter than the sores on his wrists, fresher and self-inflicted, and Hannibal is already cataloguing the ingredients he'll need to make a balm to aid their recovery.

"No," Will answers. "You're not."

At this, Hannibal stops thinking of balms and begins imagining finer string to wrap around those wrists instead. He thinks of pulling at them tighter until the skin tears completely and muscle shows through. It's a short dalliance of his imagination, but the reassurance it brings; that he can still feel the swell of hunger for Will's discomfort; it's a precious thing.

"I'm concerned —" Hannibal begins.

"You're feeling distance from me. It's not the same thing."

“If you continue this irksome behaviour I may start to savour that distance,” Hannibal replies before his better judgement can stop him. “I apologise, Will,” he adds, though he’s not entirely clear on what for.

Will nods, stretching to pick the bowl from the floor, a curse muttered under his breath at the movement.

“Porridge,” he comments after the first mouthful.

Hannibal anticipates disdain, but hears praise instead.

“It’s good.” And then, “Thanks.”

The silence that follows is almost calm; Will eats, and refuses to give further voice to his physical discomfort. Hannibal savours the panorama of Cartagena’s lazy bustle beyond the boundaries of their villa, and attempts to calculate how soon Will’s skin might heal from its most recent abrasions. This time, his motivations for willing recovery are governed by new curiosity as to how he could create new ones, and he’s feeling infinitely more secure in himself as his thoughts rail into new scenarios of sweat and blood. He reaches a palm beneath the table, behind Will’s line of sight, at the precise moment that Will decides to end their quiet truce.

“We’re not completely dead though, are we?”

The slur is still present, aided by the reducing volume of liquid in Will’s glass.

“I mean, Verger-Bloom industries are funding their very own detective agency,” Will continues with a humourless laugh into his drink.

This, Hannibal did not know.

“Guess Alana got the hint about not underestimating us after all. Well done, Alana.”

Will doesn’t sound sad as he says it, just detached, somehow. As though caught in an orbit very far from any of the floating rocks of his former life, and not ready to accept that their paths may once again fly into each other.

Hannibal’s posture shifts. “How did you find this out, Will?”

“Or maybe it was more Margot’s doing,” Will offers as conjecture. “Spent her life knowing someone was out to get her, saves herself from him –”

“Will.”

“—And now she has a chance to save her wife from the same...the same sense of hunted dread. Can hardly blame her. Can you?”

Hannibal moves until he is standing behind Will, places his hands on his shoulders and squeezes in a way he intends to be reassuring.

“Tell me how you know this, Will.”

Will shrugs, and Hannibal doesn't move his hands. “I was a cop,” he says, as though this explained everything.

Hannibal glides his hands further forward, rests them closer to the meat of Will's neck and feels the tension in Will's swallow. A gentle, almost amicable threat.

“The internet's useful like that,” Will says unhelpfully, and Hannibal fights the feeling that this is Will gaining the upper hand again. “It's how I knew where to look the other night. They've already got links to Colombia, among others. Thought the ones who'd seen us might have been on the payroll.”

Impressive. And worrying, perhaps.

“And were they?” asks Hannibal. A threat this close to their home should have warranted faster action, and he's alarmed that he hadn't even guessed at the extent of it.

Will pauses before he answers, empties his glass and appears indifferent to the pressure Hannibal is placing on his collarbones.

“No. No, they just thought we were rich and were sizing us up as a target.”

Hannibal relaxes his grasp.

“So, our idyll remains intact.”

Will smiles, lazy and with a haze to his features.

Idyll. Perhaps. Potentially, if you stop trying to lay waste to it.”

“I did only what you asked of me,” he says. “I warned you this was uncharted...”

Will twists to face him, the line of his mouth bitten and curling. His eyes are still pink, though Hannibal hopes that this is in part from the sunlight. His voice comes out like a scythe.

“You're supposed to stay, after.”

At this, Will turns back, and leans forward, peeling his back from the lounge and curving it until his head is between his knees.

“How scared were you,” Will asks the ground, “That you had to leave?”

There isn't an answer Hannibal can offer which would satisfy either of them.

Hannibal surveys the lines across the expanse of skin, hues and stripes of pinks, reds and bruising, aggravated by the contact with the lounge and raw from the morning's shower.

It's a crude gathering of brushstrokes against the canvas that is Will, and Hannibal feels pride before he considers remorse.

"I'm admitting who I am," Will says, flexing the muscles beneath the skin as though preening his injured beauty. "Do the same, Hannibal."

Hannibal places a hand on Will's shoulder, softer, this time. The skin is searing in its warmth, still. He strokes, feels each fresh contour beneath his fingertips and the vibrations as Will shakes beneath his touch.

"I'm here because I wanted to be. And if you ever leave me on that fucking floor again," Will says, voice rising in pitch, "I'll end you."

Hannibal stops his hand from pinching at the skin in reaction to Will's vulgar threat. The shake is still present, and Hannibal moves in front of Will to lift his shoulders.

He's somewhat taken aback by the sight of tears on Will's face.

"I warned you that I was not as well versed in these things as you may have hoped," Hannibal repeats, and there's that unwelcome defensiveness in his voice again. He's crouching down to Will's level, now, folding his arms around Will's and trying, almost, not to put pressure on his back.

Will nests his head in the crook of Hannibal's shoulder, dampening the shirt as tears fall from him with some ferocity. Inebriation is oddly fetching on him, Hannibal thinks, though he'd never voice this.

"Being *human*, Hannibal."

"I thought you believed us to be a monster?"

Will reciprocates the embrace, then.

"Monsters still lick each other's wounds after a battle," Will says.

"Then you'd allow me to apply a balm?"

"You're not speaking metaphorically," Will says, his voice crackling with unaddressed pain and a faint intoxicated euphoria.

Hannibal loosens the embrace, feels a tightness to his lungs at this unwelcome need to *soothe*, and heads towards the house in search of lotions.

*

Will accepts the softness of Hannibal's touch as his strong hands smooth cold cream into the skin of his back, his buttocks and his thighs. He's lying on his front, propped on his elbows. They maintain silence, for a while, both of them too brittle to trust any conversation to remain kind. Mosquitoes hum around them, and the city plays its comfortable drone, and this is as close to peace as either of them can know, for now. Will sips at his tea from the awkward angle; a lemon balm and Echinacea infusion concocted to promote healing, and gradually mutes the alcohol-tinged temper running through him. Hannibal savours the ways in which Will welcomes him in, the acquiescent way he bends to his touch and the refusal to flinch when his hands land on some still-raw patch of skin.

This alone, they both know, could never be enough.

These moments are the pleasantries, the etiquette to which they both adhere, but languishing in comfort, no matter how hard won, will never sate the hunger of either of them.

Hannibal's appetite is already growing.

Will, however, is in no state to fill the hole already yawning open. A pity.

"Has last night dissuaded you from wishing to pursue our current avenue?" Hannibal tries, massaging cream into the wrist of Will's right hand.

"What do you think?"

"I think you don't wish to answer me directly, as admitting it would concede some victory which you are trying to cling on to, in the hopes that you may spare yourself complete vulnerability. Am I right?"

Will smiles, then, an almost sober slide of muscles that shows teeth. It would look relaxed, the grin, if it didn't pull at his scar and show the gap where his tooth had been pulled from him. But for Will, it's an expression as light as the midday sun, and Hannibal allows himself to bask in it.

"I suppose," Will says, offering his other wrist for Hannibal to massage, "That it's only fair to allow you to be right about one thing today."

Hannibal grips at the skin, feels the pulse there steady, and smiles.

"I see."

"Just..."

Will flounders, and Hannibal imagines the caveat he might be thinking of adding. *Not yet*, perhaps, or *carefully*. Neither of these are requests either could make of the other without considerable acknowledgement of the hypocrisy within. And so the request remains unfinished.

"Then I should like to do some shopping," Hannibal says after some time, closing the lid of the cream and standing as Will lays his head against the cool ground.

He looks relaxed, as though in his natural state; painted with lacerations and abrasions, warmed by the sun, and lying at Hannibal's feet.

"If you come back with a paddle and...and fluffy handcuffs," says Will, his voice stretched around the syllables, "Then I'm getting on a boat back to America to turn myself in as preference."

By way of an answer, Hannibal rests his foot across the small of Will's back, the only place unmarred.

"You're assuming that I'd let you go."

Will groans lightly into the ground. "You can't keep me here all the time."

It's spoken as a challenge, and taken as such. For later, perhaps.

"I believe that I probably could," Hannibal says, removing his foot. "But in this moment, I fear the sun is trying to burn the skin I've worked very hard to heal."

Will says nothing.

"Inside, Will."

Will is still eyeing Hannibal lazily as he threatens to drag him indoors by his hair, seemingly indifferent to the threat. Hannibal isn't sure that he enjoys this casually defiant aspect of their domesticity, and the uncertainty forms movement as he leans over Will, threads his hands through his curls, and tugs.

"Jesus, Hannibal."

Will pushes himself up onto his elbows as Hannibal releases his grip, and fumbles for further purchase as he attempts to draw himself to his feet. He lets Hannibal assist him, faltering only slightly when the support pulls away.

"I'm merely doing what's best for you," Hannibal tells him with no small amount of satisfaction.

They head inside, and for a short moment, Hannibal considers making good on his promise to keep Will interned in the house, locking him in one of the bathrooms or tethering him to the headboard of their bed, but he lets the moment pass without action. For now, Will is safely and securely *his*, as much as he is Will's. And he needs Will to recover as fully as time will allow, because he knows himself well enough to know that this deficit of cruelty will only stand for so long.

What (tentatively) lovely domestic bliss this is! It's almost as though they could be happy this way. It sure is lucky that they're good at staying below radar, right?

And, apologies for the lateness of the update – this was a much harder chapter for some reason (I blame the lack of justifiable violence) – and much as I would like to promise a swifter follow up to this one, I, uh, can't. I am very, very slow. But, I will do my best, and thank you so much for the comments, the encouragement, the subscriptions and just for reading this, you lovely, lovely beans.

Tempest

Chapter Summary

In which common sense and communication are eclipsed by inappropriate firearm usage, grand gestures, and the weather.

Chapter Notes

Brief mention of The Tooth (but no pulling)

Days pass in a drag as the skin on Will's back heals. No one comes to hunt them at their villa, and no one interrupts Hannibal's daytime visits to the city.

It's calm.

Will adapts to the quiet with growing frustration; there's a threat looming, he swears. He pores over the news websites, the furrows in his brow deepening and flexing with each refresh of a web page. And Hannibal does not respond; waits until Will has put the tablet down, reviews the browser history, and makes his own assessment. There are indeed risks, substantial ones, even, but none of them urgent.

Will grows restless in other ways, and this, Hannibal thinks, is perhaps cruel; he has not touched Will since he dragged him back into the house on that drunken morning.

He watches Will struggling to apply the lotions meant to heal him, and offers no help, even when bluntly asked for. It's better, he tells Will, that they not fall into the trap of dependency. He ignores Will's laughter at that, and pretends not to hear the *little late* that follows.

He watches Will's behaviour move from irritation to positively coquettish. He watches at the poolside as Will stretches out fully, extending his arms above his head in the way that he *shouldn't*, not with his shoulder the way it is, and Hannibal thinks to chastise him, but instead allows his gaze to fall on Will's tautened midriff, on the shimmering trail of scarring, the muscles contracting on his abdomen, the hollowed plateau of flesh in sunlight, and Hannibal thinks of his hands inside that skin, burrowed through the layers of dermis, reaching through the warm wet of organs flopping against his fingers. He thinks of reaching up through it all,

behind the ribs pressed tight against Will's skin, and gripping at the heart that beats so temptingly at him, holding each beat inside his grip like the wings of a frantic bird, and holding until it stills, until the wings of it no longer captivate him.

A tempting daydream, but not a practical one.

And so, Hannibal looks away.

And each time Will attempts to initiate a touch with any depth to it, Hannibal extricates himself from it, and feigns indifference.

It's not that he doesn't want to savour it. It's strategic. Hannibal guards his tendency toward affection as though it were something poisonous. He feels it; as an ache in the threads of his being that springs into sharp spasms whenever Will tempts him. He *could* give it ownership of his impulses. So, so easily. And yet he knows that if he does, it will unravel him.

If Hannibal is to be the one in control, then Hannibal needs to master himself first. And as the intimacy between them grows vast spaces in which to breathe and to doubt, Will's easy confidence ebbs, giving way to the guardedness of his old self. Hannibal works to replenish the diminishing stores of wine and spirits as Will diverts his affections toward his drink, instead. He *can* control each and every reaction to Will, outwardly at least, and so he does.

And in the days when Hannibal visits the city, he buys gifts for Will. Some of them tasteful; antique contraptions with locks and hinges and certificates of authenticity, others more crude, from the sorts of vendors he rarely favours, but who offer the sorts of wares he thinks Will may come to appreciate.

The gifts multiply, and remain hidden from Will.

Hannibal waits, accepts the brunt of Will's discordant moods, until such time as he believes Will to be healed enough, and for himself to be emotionally strong enough to utilise them.

"I thought you found firearms impersonal," Will says, and he's sitting on the edge of the bed, watching Hannibal pull items from a small suitcase as though waiting for a punchline. There's a hitch to his breath as Hannibal reaches behind the opened lid. He's aware, now, that every item pulled from this case and placed next to him is something that Hannibal has bought and chosen for *him*; he's been summoned from the pool to bear witness to Hannibal's offerings. The gun, it seems, has confused him with its incongruity; a long-barrelled shooter

with a box of cartridges, currently resting next to an expensive looking bottle of lotion, a handful of weighty padlocks, and a set of four extravagantly sized cuffs. Hannibal pulls a strip of broad white fabric from the case and zips it closed. There'll be ample time to explore the items still hidden inside it. And keeping Will guessing as to the tools that await him is no small pleasure for Hannibal.

"Indeed," Hannibal answers, allowing his voice a slowness which he hopes conveys control.

In this setting, Will seems reluctant to speak unless spoken to.

Truthfully, Hannibal is grateful for the reprieve. The barbs delivered during the preceding days have been uncomfortably astute, save for those alluding to Will's anxiety that Hannibal no longer finds him...interesting.

The air outside the villa is thick with heat and swelling banks of clouds, the air conditioning whirs at a high pitch inside their bedroom, and Hannibal can smell the impending storm. He knows that the movement of the weather is not of his own making, but he appreciates the synchronicity. He has been looking forward to this since the skin on Will's back began to close over and the hues of bruising subsided into pinks and whites.

Will, still damp from the pool water, looks less expectant than Hannibal had hoped for.

"Tell me what you expect to happen, Will."

Will's tongue flicks his lower lip, and it's a gesture of nerves, not seduction. The shorts he's wearing are inadequate against the chill of the air conditioning, and his skin is raising in prickles. Hannibal wills the nervishness and insecurities of the past week to manifest into a form of fear more interesting than mere doubt.

"I'm expecting..."

Will hesitates. His eyes are skipping across the items laid out on the bedcovers next to him, not landing near Hannibal.

"I'm expecting that whatever transpires next will be entirely your experience. That this is something you have speculated, contemplated, and will execute in a way which is entirely to your liking."

Hannibal does not like this answer.

The words bear the imprint of Will's strategic, hopeful requests for Hannibal to assert control in all physical areas, and this alone would be acceptable. The words, however, are diminished by the guarded way in which they are spoken, and the heavily implied dejection.

Hannibal sits himself on the bed, a chink of metal punctuating the movement.

"I'm not sure," Will says, and now he's looking at Hannibal, eyes steel, "that I hold any relevance to your wishes right now."

The chill of the room threads its way through Hannibal's shirt.

“That’s an unfair –”

“Fairness isn’t our domain, Hannibal.”

Hannibal does not enjoy hearing his name spoken as though it were a curse.

Will stands to adjust the temperature of the room, his arms placed protectively round him as he sits back. The rigidity of his posture is not the aroused tension Hannibal had anticipated, and he does not wish this setting to be used for a fight; the tools at hand were meant for a more enjoyable purpose.

“You’re restless,” Will continues. “You’re hankering after the thrill of a hunt. Of being hunted.”

Hannibal has no defence against this. He does not confess his disappointment that his excursions into the city have been without cause for incident, nor does he voice his upset that Will does not appear to share in it.

“Idleness is a poor method to improve one’s situation,” he offers instead.

“You want me only in the ways you saw me at the docks,” Will says, and he’s looking away again. “On the bluff. When I’m realising your imagined... potentials. Not mine.”

“They’re not imagined, Will. You know this.”

“You don’t want a *partner*,” Will tells him, distaste for the word. “You want a receptacle for your impulses, or you want a beast of becoming. You can’t sustain yourself on all the parts in between. Without them, you have no desire but to destroy. It’s what you do.”

Sitting no longer feels like an adequate position to bear the weight of their conversation, yet Hannibal can’t bring himself to move. He feels each neuron firing in refutation of Will’s statements, and yet none of them are combining to form the words which would articulate it. Will knows himself to be that beast, and Will now knows himself as the willing subject of his exploration.

He does want Will, in those small and quiet ways where they tend to the parts of each other which don’t require blood. And he has always wanted the parts in between. But, he knows that there is a grim truth in what Will is telling him.

That without violence, the two of them are simply ordinary. And whilst Will may have found comfort in this in the past, Hannibal cannot.

A weight lifts from the bed, and by the time Hannibal has raised his eyes, Will is pulling clothes from the hangers in the wardrobe.

“You need brutality,” Will says, chin to chest as he fiddles the buttons of his shirt closed. “I thought if I offered it to you, it could be enough.”

“Then why do you believe it isn’t?”

Hannibal means it to sound reasonable, but his voice crackles.

Will keeps his back turned as he swaps shorts for trousers, pulling socks from the shelf.

“You *know* why.”

This – this is what Hannibal loathes. Will’s endless assertions that Hannibal is a step further ahead of Will’s thoughts than he is. He still finds himself rooted to the bed, frustration transitioning to the more familiar feel of fury. The evidence that it *is* enough, that Hannibal wants this, it’s evident in the room in this moment; the spoils of every wish he’s had these last days to see Will sated, all made manifest in the tools laid out on the bed and those still concealed in the suitcase.

Hannibal wants to say this, somehow. To express to Will, now toeing his feet into shoes, that his thoughts are so intricately twisted with Will’s that he isn’t sure he would remember the mechanics of breathing were Will not there to remind him of its import. That despite the annoyances, the irritations, the discreet disappointments and indiscreet manipulations, that Will is now a presence living at the core of him. Instead, what comes out is:

“You’re being remarkably obtuse, Will.”

The sky flashes beyond the window.

“Fuck you.”

The low rumble of thunder that follows is too distant to match Hannibal’s tumult of reactions, and he feels mildly betrayed by it.

“Will.”

Will turns, at last, and his mouth is a line; a skewer of emotion in an impassive face.

“*Hannibal*.”

Hannibal’s voice is too quiet, too needy. “Now may be a poor time to venture out, even if you do not wish to share in my company.” He gestures towards the flickering sky.

Will’s laugh is a sharp thing.

“That’s a poor attempt at co-dependency. Even for you.”

Will’s hand is on the door as Hannibal leaps from the bed. He has means of control beyond words, and as all else has left him, this is not a chance he wishes to take. He’s holding Will’s right arm, expecting the twist of limbs that follows, and then his hand is at Will’s throat and his body has him pinned against the wood of the door.

“I’d take the storm over this right now,” Will says, the constriction of Hannibal’s hand tainting his words with a rasp.

“Everything here is for *you*,” Hannibal says, no generosity in his voice. “This is your construct. You asked for my cruelty?”

Will raises his knee, hard, fast, into Hannibal’s groin.

Then, he smacks a palm into Hannibal’s solar plexus.

Before Hannibal can find breath, Will is reaching again for the door handle.

“Cruelty and dishonesty are different beasts,” Will tells him simply. He’s almost over the threshold when he tells Hannibal:

“At least what’s outside is just plain destructive.”

If Hannibal was being fair, he would let Will go. The sky flickers again, more vibrant, and the patter of rain grows dense. Will’s footsteps track across the corridor, down the stairs, dimming with increased distance.

Will himself admitted that neither of them are versed in fairness, and so Hannibal follows Will’s path, impressed at how much Will’s deftly delivered assaults have hindered him. Will is, perhaps, far more attuned to the violence he faults Hannibal for being drawn to, and therein lies the truth of them. Both struggling to accept the facets of their personalities they view as undesirable, and blaming the other for it. Will with his visceral fury, and Hannibal with... Will. The consolidation of these thoughts reassures Hannibal that his actions in this moment are justified; that Will is simply in some abject state of self-denial. So, when the front door clicks, Hannibal feels no guilt in the way he creeps behind Will, loops his arm across his neck and pulls until Will’s neck is caught firm in the crook of his elbow and his heels are dragging on the ground.

He wants Will here on his terms, but he’s prepared to manoeuvre him into a position whereby he may at least consider those terms more fully.

“Tell me you intend to leave,” Hannibal says, face warm from where Will’s knuckles have twisted to meet it in a punch too twisted to cause damage.

Will stills, then.

“I needed air,” Will strains against Hannibal’s elbow.

It’s all the pause Hannibal needs.

He’s dragging Will backwards up the stairs, his other arm pinioning Will at the shoulders.

“I see,” Hannibal says, exertion in his voice. Seven steps up, he remarks, “If I were to let go, or if your attempts to wriggle free succeed, I imagine you would fall.”

Will says nothing, his feet pushing in tandem with Hannibal’s, not against.

“Good,” offers Hannibal as they reach the top. He moves away from the stairs’ edge before he lets go, not yet trusting Will not to shunt him down at the fastest opportunity. He does not

wish to experience another fall, no matter how short the distance.

Hannibal opens the bedroom door and gestures for Will to enter as though he were a guest, and not the unruly charge he'd yanked from escape.

Will's cheeks are red as he sits back on the bed, more heavily than before. There's defeat in his posture, but it's eclipsed by a bloom of rage, quietly radiating. He looks, in poise, like an unruly child, dragged before the headmaster. Sullen, and resigned.

Rain drills at the windows now, and thunder growls nearer.

"I believe staying indoors is more of a necessity than a sign of acquiescence."

Will nods, staring at the window and the swirls of water running from it.

Hannibal means to be reassuring. He sits next to Will, sweeping the metal ornaments out of view in a dexterous movement and resting a hand on Will's shoulder.

"I suspect we are living two lives with each other. And that this may be the source of your distress."

"The way we are, and the way we believe each other to be?" Will asks. His stance is softening, though not enough to seem tamed.

"Then three lives, perhaps."

"Explain, please."

Hannibal is thankful for the prompt. Fighting Will with force is a pleasure, for both of them. When their words are the sparring tools, however, it becomes frustrating. He's on the cusp of losing Will and he needs every friendly advantage he can take.

"We are navigating the versions of each other that led us here, still. From the profound impacts of our lives upon the other, to the mundanities of cohabitation."

"The profound being where I only earn your acceptance with a gallon of a stranger's blood on my hands?"

"The profound being where I watch you grapple with your instincts until they begin to match your actions," Hannibal corrects, irritation creeping in.

"Or where," Will continues, unphased, "you wrangle with the detail that you're experiencing love, and it terrifies you so much that you try and kill it, metaphorically and literally. I assume there's a point to the gun?"

Hannibal drops his arm as the presence of one word renders all others near impotent.

It's a word they use, but never directly.

Not without the brackets of theoretical statements, metaphors, euphemisms.

Never about themselves.

It condenses all they are into a single word, merging the complexities of each other into a single syllable understood by billions.

And usually associated with acts of great foolishness and outright idiocy.

“Either way,” Will says, and his eyes are so cold as he speaks. “All you’re offering me is death.”

There’s a discussion to be had about the meaning of death, Hannibal thinks. Because he does not believe that Will has fully grasped its relationship to life. He does not trust his words to convey his meaning, not when Will is poised at a brink, albeit an emotional one, and ready to drop.

“And yet,” counters Hannibal, slipping from the bed and onto his knees in front of Will, “your challenges to it were somewhat halfhearted.”

“I’m learning to embrace unavoidable truths.”

“By failing to see them.”

Will closes his eyes as Hannibal reached for the gun. Opens them when he hears the sound of a cartridge being fed into it. Widens them as the barrel is angled at his chest.

“This is what you believe I intend, is it not?”

Will watches as the barrel moves closer, until it’s pressing through his shirt.

“I guess I had this coming from the times I pointed one of these at you.”

He’s smiling; a twist of his mouth and a shine to his teeth as the sky lights up behind them.

Will’s heartbeat reverberates through the weapon. It’s quickening.

Not lacking in intimacy after all.

Hannibal’s free hand rests on Will’s leg. Will lays his own over it.

“You’re not trying to stop me,” Hannibal says, the gun nuzzling against skin as the barrel slips between buttons.

“You didn’t,” Will says.

The room lights up violet, and nothing more is said before the aftermath of the lightning rolls through the sky.

“I would prefer you to favour life, to this.”

“I’m trying to.”

Will stares at him, and there's confusion and something too close to loathing to make Hannibal feel comfortable.

What Hannibal feels in this moment is not yet arousal, and he supposes that the residual soreness in his groin from Will's knee is largely to blame. Will's pulse is thudding and his skin presses against the barrel.

"By courting your death?" Hannibal asks.

"You've been courting that since we met," Will answers, remaining infuriatingly still and unreadable beyond the thump of his heartbeat. "Why would you choose a gun, Hannibal?"

Hannibal speaks before he can choose more careful words.

"To see you as you were on the docks."

Will frowns, then his eyebrows lift in realisation.

"There was something..." Hannibal falters, feels Will's hand wrapping across his, at the base of the weapon.

"...Evocative, about your interaction with the weapon."

"Oh."

There's a new flush to Will's skin, and a flinch in his muscles as Hannibal trails the weapon upwards, past the open collar of the shirt and to the bare skin of his neck, Will's grasp accompanying his own as an endorsement.

"Yet you seem more captivated by the idea of me killing you."

Will shifts his head; a gesture that oscillates between a shake and a nod.

"I admit I preferred it when there was some reciprocity to the act," Hannibal says, threading a hand through Will's hair as Will's arms drop loose to his side, in a gesture that Hannibal has come to recognise in Will as a specific sort of submission. "But as you wish me to be a tool in your pity and self annihilation, then so be it."

Hannibal is smiling to himself, and Will can't see it; his eyes closed as though holding his disorientation inside. The evening, Hannibal thinks, could yet be salvaged.

"Humour me?" Hannibal asks, the weapon now nudging at Will's closed mouth.

Will opens his mouth to answer, and Hannibal slides the barrel past his teeth.

Will backs from it, pushing it out of the way.

"No."

The room flashes violet again.

“It’s too much like vertigo,” Will says, taking the gun from Hannibal’s hand in a way that feels not unlike castration. “You’re cold, you’re vicious, you’re indifferent, and then you expect me to open up and accept whatever you deem...appropriate. When you decide.”

This is possibly a fair assessment.

“Consistency has rarely been assigned as one of my virtues, Will. Nor yours.”

Will burrows his face in his hands, missing Hannibal’s flourish as he pulls a locket from a chain concealed beneath his shirt.

“I know,” Will says to his hands. “I just...”

He looks up, as Hannibal opens the locket; it’s an ornate, jaded looking piece of jewellery, and Will is surprised to see it.

“Never doubt that I want you close to me,” Hannibal says, showing Will the contents of the ornamental piece. “In whatever way I can. Please do not mistake my actions for disinterest. See?”

Will frowns at the ivory sheen contained inside, then his mouth sits open in disbelief as Hannibal rests the enamel object in his hand.

“You’ve been...wearing my tooth.”

“I believe it would have been unwise to consume it, even though I was tempted.”

Will pulls Hannibal closer to him, then. Enough that their arms become a thread, the tooth curled inside Hannibal’s fist.

“I suppose,” Will says, with some unease, “that I should stop trying to gauge our interactions on any kind of scale approaching normality.”

There’s a smile to his words, the first sincere one that Hannibal has seen or heard from him in days, and he wants to drink it dry.

The sky flickers, then booms, and then there are lips on Hannibal’s; tentative, still, but promising something like forgiveness. Or perhaps mere understanding. Hannibal believes the principles to be intricately linked, and then he pushes out the thoughts of concepts and ideals and submerges himself in the taste of Will that he has denied himself for so long.

They pull back, and the flurry of impulsiveness dissipates under Will’s concerned expression.

Hannibal doesn’t want the concern to be given voice, doesn’t trust that Will won’t dismantle the fragile truce with the workings of his mind. And so, he kisses him in return, using teeth and pushing himself between Will’s legs until Will folds backwards onto the bed.

“Do you trust that I don’t intend to kill you?” he asks, mouth creeping to Will’s jaw and his hands hurriedly securing the molar back inside the locket.

“Never.”

Will shunts further up the bed, allowing Hannibal room to rest his knees inside the splay of Will’s legs.

Their skin grows sweat as Hannibal works to remove Will’s clothes, and Will works Hannibal’s from him in turn. Words remain unsaid as they readjust to the feelings of flesh and muscle moving close. Hannibal waits until his teeth have bitten Will into a near soporific state until he reaches again for the gun.

He is still very much in control.

His groin is telling him otherwise, but this is a challenge he is now becoming acclimatised to.

Will eyes the weapon with less wariness than before, the lids of his eyes flickering in the light of the storm, yet he stiffens. The barrel knocks against his teeth, and there’s an expression that Hannibal is more used to seeing on the dogs Will kept than on any human, before Will opens his mouth and accepts it.

“Speak to me, Will.”

The barrel slides down the flat of Will’s tongue, and Hannibal reaches for the bottle of lubricant with his free hand as Will utters an incomprehensible sound.

“Uccch.”

“I believe you could try a little harder.”

Hannibal drapes the liquid across his hand and cups it beneath Will’s balls, slipping and pressing against the skin until his fingers languish against their target.

Will’s head back against the pillows, he reaches for the gun as it nudges the back of his throat, all manner of guttural sounds forming a symphony which Hannibal treasures as only his.

“No, Will.”

Will’s grip gains purchase and Hannibal has to use both hands to retrieve it, smearing lube over the base of it in the process.

This is somewhat less cooperative than he would like.

The solution to this is rattling to his side, and Hannibal chastises himself for not utilising it sooner; he had been enjoying Will’s unfettered hands on him too much to want to constrain their movements. But, he is nothing if not adaptable.

Will coughs, chest contracting with the force of it, too distracted by the automated actions of his own body to protest Hannibal securing his wrists to the headboard. He's careful, still, not to pull Will's arms at too severe an angle; the scar in his shoulder still covering damages that have yet to heal. The fight that Will offers by the second wrist is more a performance than a defence, and this helps to absolve Hannibal of any guilt at the way Will grimaces as the cuffs loop tight inside the bite of the padlocks.

"Tell me why you think I'm killing you," he says, gun back in his hand and then burrowed inside the wet of Will's mouth before Hannibal can consider that the threat of his words sounded more direct than intended.

Will gags.

Hannibal presses the gun a little further in.

"Talk for me."

There's little more than an *aaaauuch* and clank of metal against the headboard, and already Hannibal's insides are folding over themselves to keep up with what he's feeling. He loves, in all the brutal and fierce ways that he knows how to, the way Will is when he's embodying the power that terrifies him. When he's biting the skin from a stranger, or tearing flesh with his hands. And yet, here, now, Hannibal is watching that same ferociousness turned inwards. The fight against himself; to bear the humiliation, and to weather each facet of Hannibal's cruelty, and to strain every fibre inside him against what he so desperately, achingly thrives off. It's a sight unparalleled.

The sound of retching pulls Hannibal from his reverie, and he pulls the gun from Will's mouth with some reluctance to gift him reprieve.

"I fu-uoghghhhh."

Only a brief respite.

He's working his other hand against Will with force, now; fingers slipping as he pools more lubricant around the creases and crevices, moving past the first twitches of resistance until his index finger can slide freely in.

"Speak, Will."

The noises increase in pitch as he slides a second finger in, stilling to savour the protraction of vowels echoing through the gun's chamber. Will arches to the sensation, and Hannibal has never felt such affinity to the deities than like this, spread across Will and holding him full as his body writhes to his commands. Will, he knows, is taking no small delight in his own suffering. Though the position of his body affords him no clear view of Will's arousal, the heat and the heartbeat and the shine of Will's eyes and the tremble in him is indicator enough.

As Will's eyes begin leaking and his noises more sporadic, Hannibal slides the weapon from behind his teeth, trailing saliva as he draws it towards Will's navel.

Coughing fills the room again, and is drowned out by a boom of thunder which rattles the sky,

“Good,” Hannibal tells him, ignoring the request for water. He has none to hand and he is not prepared to interrupt any moment of this.

He’s shuffling down the bed, shifting to tilt Will at the hips, to arch his legs onto his shoulders to ease the movement of his third and fourth fingers inside.

Will bites back a *fuck* as Hannibal withdraws, pulling at his wrists for some traction in the rest of him and not succeeding. And then the weapon is back in Hannibal’s hand, and it’s slick, now, and Will’s eyes are like punctures as the metal of it skims his cock.

“Tell me why I won’t kill you, Will.”

Will is rendered mute by the slide of the barrel past the small gape of his entrance. Then, he’s gasping, and the barrel of it begins to disappear inside, shifting and tilting and pushing and now, Will looks scared.

“Tell me,” Hannibal says, and he’s barely holding onto himself but this, Will biting at his lip to keep himself from shouting, this is not an act he can risk losing himself in.

“Because,” Will says, voice rough as splintered glass, “you’ve got the – *ah* –”

The curve of metal in front of the trigger presses against Will’s skin.

“Safety on,” Will manages.

Hannibal pulls at the catch, a clear enough gesture that Will can see exactly what he’s doing, if not feel it.

“And now?” Hannibal asks, the leak of his own cock now beginning to match Will’s in urgency.

He pulls the weapon back, feels a clutch trying to drag it back, and uses all of his practiced willpower not to imagine that same clutch against *him*.

The push and the drag forms an *accelerando*, accentuated by the quickening of Will’s breaths and the way his skin burns hot at Hannibal’s fingertips. He can’t last, like this, and already the syllables of Hannibal’s name are dropping into the air in the form of pleas, to touch, now, *please*.

Hannibal toys his fingers near the trigger, tries to imagine the temptation of pulling, tries to feel the way he imagined Will had, when he first used the same motion.

He pulls his fingers into a retreat. It would be too easy, he knows, to allow impulsive curiosity to ruin them both. He wraps his hand fully around the base instead, considers reapplying the safety but finds it a move too far. He’s jamming it inside Will now, using all resistance known to him not to touch himself as Will curls and folds with what movements he

can. Will's shaking is frantic, and he's shouting curses, interchanging Hannibal's name with all manner of celestial entities.

He's lit up again; the room a glaring white for an instant.

Hannibal's hands are sliding, over the weapon and over Will's skin and he just needs to focus, and –

The crack shakes the walls of the room, and for less than a second, Hannibal panics. He hears his name dissolve into a guttural roar, swallowed by the aftermath of the thunderclap, and his hands are on himself as he reassures himself that Will is very much alive, twitching around the metal, stomach now laced with his own ejaculate.

He's given Will what he needed. And without touch, in a sense.

Pride blooms within Hannibal, only it's a victorious, dirty sort of elation. It rumbles through him, teases itself out by his fingertips, and then with his fist, and it's seconds if that long before he's spilled himself out into the waiting damp of Will's skin.

He pulls the gun away, wiping it discreetly as the lactic shake of his limbs matches Will's in a hum.

They're both grasping for air, still.

Stunned, sated and exhausted from so few seconds, and Will is *everything* to Hannibal in this moment, dishevelled and damp and magnificent, and this moment is one he will stretch into a forever, if he can.

He rests his head against Will's chest, inhaling the quietened panic and perspiration, loosely aware that Will does not yet have any means of movement.

The air beyond the room continues to roar and strobe, while the space within it feels calm, at last. Just breathing. Hannibal pushes back his one lingering worry; that the figurative trigger for Will's orgasm had been a belief that a more literal trigger had been pulled.

It's not that Will wishes himself dead, Hannibal considers. Or that he places little enough value on his life that he'd forsake it for this. It's the violence, and the thrill of it. The spark that serves to ignite those places inside him he still fears, despite their radiance.

"What did you mean by the second life we're living?" Will asks in a rasp. Hannibal moves to reach for the glass of water by the bedside, tilting it to Will's lips before he considers that he could release Will's arms and let him hydrate himself.

"Third life, even," Will says when Hannibal moves the glass and drinks from it.

Sometimes, Hannibal wishes that Will could allow his mind more quiet.

"This."

Will nods in contemplation as Hannibal locates the keys to the padlocks, unhooking each wrist in turn and rubbing the skin until he feels warmth inside his grasp.

“The life where we transpose who we are into our most intimate actions,” Hannibal says, handing Will a cloth and hoping that his wrists are not too sore to wipe his stomach dry. “And where I find myself wanting to please you, above all else.”

Will drops the now soiled cloth onto the nightstand. Smiles, loose and easy this time.

“How truly altruistic you must be, focusing solely on my pleasure and giving no thought to your own,” Will says, in an uncanny imitation of Hannibal’s patois. His expression turns serious again before Hannibal can feign indignation at the mockery. “Do you think we can keep these multiple lives going?”

“These are not spinning plates, Will. Our lives are ours to intertwine and unravel as we wish.”

Will nods again, shifts so that he’s lying on his side facing Hannibal.

“Don’t...don’t go cold on me like that again,” he says with an uncharacteristic lack of finesse, hand resting tentatively on Hannibal’s arm. Still hesitant, even after all the evening has brought them through.

“I can no more promise my future actions than you can promise who you will be each new day” Hannibal answers, slinking down the bed until he’s horizontal, and can reach his arms around Will to pull him closer.

“You’re an asshole.”

“I know.”

Hannibal rests his nose in Will’s hair, welcomes the coil of limbs between his and tries to convey that he really, truly, intends to keep Will as his, always.

“I couldn’t let you leave me,” he says. “Not in life, nor in death.”

Will makes a sound at that, something gentle that gets lost in the spaces between their skin.

“Go to sleep, Will.”

Waking

Chapter Summary

In which the after-effects of creative weapon usage threaten to spoil Hannibal's fun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Morning sifts through the air vents, carrying the scent of petrichor. It filters through the sweat-drenched tendrils of Will's hair, where Hannibal's nose rests. There's a top note somewhere in the myriad of aromas; a tang, thin and sharp and sweet. Blood, of course. Will's. A delicate, thin hint of something damaged in ways he hadn't seen the previous night, not through the biting or the struggling. A curiosity.

Skin sticks to skin, and Hannibal rouses himself without movement, his chest meeting the indents of Will's back, legs tucked into legs, and his fingers stretching across the slow rise and drop of Will's stomach. It's a precious kind of peace. Will shifts; a halt in breathing, a half cough, and then his lungs resume their languorous, rumbling breaths. The shuffle of skin puts Hannibal altogether closer than mere comfort, though the concept of anything more vigorous than this gentle stasis has yet to manifest.

His Will.

He's certain that this incarnation of himself that's woken, so serenely satisfied at his lot, would be something of a stranger to the man who first had this twitchy, awkward man thrust in front of him by the stalwarts of the FBI. He thinks, as Will coughs himself awake, that he doesn't mind the change.

Will doesn't speak. He reaches for Hannibal's hand and presses it closer to his stomach, and shifts back into where Hannibal is starting to press into him. It's tempting, in the way that a bared neck tempts the knife. Hannibal counts out three rises and three falls of the breath in Will's belly before he can suppress the urge to press more fully. He waits another two as Will wriggles against him. He doesn't seem to make willpower an easy feat for him to master, like this.

"I'll make us breakfast," he tells Will.

"No."

Will's hand wraps around his, and guides it to the tufts of hair some inches beneath his scar. His grip is disarmingly strong for someone so recently woken, and this blows another hole into Hannibal's resolve.

Will's voice is still thick, still caught in the pillow that swallows half of his face. "You'll put your hands on me."

Hannibal stiffens at the words. He also finds himself without a reply, with his hand being guided to the swollen texture of Will's cock. There are justifications for him to resist, to withhold, but they seem fragmented when placed against the solid warmth growing beneath his fingertips.

He skims his fingernails across the smooth head, bedding himself into the cleft of Will's cheeks. He's past the point of resisting, now. But he could yet decide whether to make Will regret the assertiveness of his hunger. His hands feel too dry, with too much awkwardness in the delicate friction he's building with his hand, Will's fingers still guiding him. He's distracted, momentarily, by the way the tip of his own cock has found something damp and this, he knows, isn't right; the albeit cursory wash last night should have left something of a clean slate this morning. Will is oblivious, curling his spine as Hannibal drags the thinnest trail of precum down his shaft. Hannibal presses again, and there's no relaxation of flesh to welcome him, yet. Will hisses into the pillow.

"Will?"

Will doesn't verbalise anything, only greets the new discomfort as an additional test of endurance, freeing his left arm to speed Hannibal's hand around his cock, his breathing now eked out through ground teeth. It's disconcerting, to have Will suffering without a visible cause, and though it seems to have only sped the urgency with which Hannibal seeks relief, it necessitates a pause from the curious tacky friction growing from Will's movements.

Will creeps his left arm beneath him at the interruption, his fingers reaching for purchase and scratching instead at the skin of Hannibal's thighs and this is too much of a distraction; this clumsy, purposeful insistence.

"Will."

Hannibal tries to manoeuvre himself backwards, his own left arm still trapped between them with no range of movement to it. Will matches the movement, keeping him wrapped around the heating skin and feeling more confined than is comfortable.

Hannibal's pressing again, needing the contact more than feeling concern for its texture, and Will is shaking in his hold. The gasp that spits from Will's throat is indiscernible between one borne of pain or desperation and *god*, Hannibal needs to exorcise this *wanting* from his system. It's a swift movement that rolls Will onto his stomach, the grip of both of their hands remaining unbroken, with the added trappings of the sheets beneath them layering groans into Will's breathing. He lets Will shift his hips up, sliding his weight onto his thighs and knees as he shrugs the duvet off them both. Hannibal prefers this, he thinks; Will's scuff-marked spine visible beneath him, face still sideways into the pillow and his own left hand now free to attend to himself.

"*Hannibal.*"

Will shudders as he speaks the name, the rush of release spurting through Hannibal's fingers. Indignation at having been beaten to the finish only heightens Hannibal's urgency, his rutting

now feeling utterly ineffectual. He sits back on his heels, his damp hand meeting his dry one to pull himself as Will wilts beneath him. He replays the echo of Will drawling his name, hears it like a song or a siren. Will's skin beneath him is a bloom, and he finds himself reaching to part Will's buttocks not out of intention, but to show himself how fully this man, this *creature*, is his. *All* of him. He feels himself contracting, swelling. He can see blood; a gentle trail of it on Will, and it belongs there, as much as he belongs here. It's all *his*. The expulsion comes in a wave, and then a shudder, stringing down Will's back and ending where the blood trail begins.

His muscles liquefy as he drops himself next to Will, careful to avoid the mess, a hand reaching to rest in his hair.

The fragments of earlier concern regroup in the quiet moments between them. Realisation fits into the assembly of thoughts as the cause of that sweet scent forms an image of the previous night; the gun, of course. The foresight; such a small interruption to the smooth circle of the barrel, but enough to have torn, when moving with speed and the violence that their intimacies invoke.

The knowledge causes a quiet satisfaction in Hannibal. Understanding is always a gift, however small. Then, it causes a second wave of concern; this time, for himself and for the thing he will have to once again deny himself; damage requires recovery. He finds himself forgetting this, at times when it is convenient for him to do so, and the resurgence of this knowledge is rarely welcome.

Will shifts onto his elbows, moving to roll over. Hannibal sees the threads of liquid drying on his back and does not wish it disturbed, so places the flat of his hand between Will's shoulderblades and pushes back down.

"Stay as you are," he offers as elaboration. Will doesn't question this, seeming content to rest his head back into the pillow as Hannibal resumes the gentle rolling of fingers through his hair.

"It seems you've sustained some injury from last night, Will."

There's a full breath of pause before Will answers.

"You make it sound as though I did it to myself." It sounds more incisive than questioning, and Hannibal enjoys the bite of the words.

"Arguably, you did."

Will moves to sit up again, to answer back without the veil of a pillow half smothering his words. Hannibal pushes him back down with more strength, this time.

"*We* did," Will corrects. "We can't claim separateness of intention, or of action."

Hannibal hears the truth in Will's words, and feels something like power being sapped from him as the understanding of the statement swells in its place. He is not the agent of his own direction, not truly. This is more than mere adaptation; it's a melding.

“Then my actions are your actions,” he tells Will. If Will is honest, then he must accept this, too.

“Yes.”

“Then you are no longer appalled?” Hannibal presses, in the way that one worries at a wound, waiting to see if it will deepen or cease bleeding.

“We can be appalled at ourselves. It’s what shapes and steers our future actions.”

Hannibal accepts this, feeling somewhat shaken from his moorings. He tries to conjure intentions too violent for Will to adapt to, to prove that his motivations are separate. His mind is quick to supply the cruelty that would surely set himself as perpetrator and Will as recipient, but his mind is equally fast in reminding him that this is a manipulation in itself, and that Will has burrowed so far into his being that he would expect nothing less. The distance he’d imposed in the days preceding last night seem utterly redundant; Will’s former neediness now replaced by something so powerfully secure in its own knowledge of the both of them.

The mess on Will’s back looks less like a stamp of ownership in this newly lucid light, and Hannibal finds his enjoyment of it dulled.

“You should shower,” he tells Will, knowing that by volunteering instruction, he is at least reassembling the constructs of authority. He tugs Will’s hair, a little, to emphasise.

Will moves easily from the bed, waiting until he’s standing by the door with an arm already scratching behind him until he answers.

“I thought you’d never ask,” he says. And it’s in that moment, when Will’s face flashes with a smile so sharp that it cuts lines across his face, that Hannibal realises the simple play of power that’s just taken place; that Will simply wanted the freedom to return his skin to comfort, and that it would only be possible if he removed Hannibal’s need to see his discomfort continue.

A short fury flares inside Hannibal, though he finds it mostly directed at himself for being so readily taken in by every surge and fall of Will’s words. And then that spark flickers something else in him, something more familiar; there’s pride in Will, and there’s the need to reclaim his own. They may be merged, but he is not yet ready to be subsumed.

He listens to the sound of water running through the bathroom door, and begins musing on the ways in which he can regain his ever-dwindling sense of control.

Chapter End Notes

Sincerest apologies for this update taking so very long; the multiple curses of 2016 sort of got in the way. But! More things are planned for this, including some possibly non-

sordid events - and though I can't promise when this will be, it will be. Thank you, as always, for the reading of this and the encouragement.

Inquicisión

Chapter Summary

In which a desperately unsafe attempt at teasing yields alarming results.

Chapter Notes

Hi there! So, this is the first update in many, many months - with apologies for the unplanned hiatus. The story is now written in its entirety (despite a recent mishap involving the deletion and subsequent rewriting of...most of it). So, with just a couple of rounds of editing to go, the next few updates should be a little more regular than this one has been.

When Hannibal leaves the villa later that afternoon, he does so with a degree of verve, and of purpose.

“Visiting a museum,” Will had told him, “doesn’t usually require a preliminary stakeout of the venue.”

Hannibal had not offered further detail.

“Unless you’re planning to visit out of hours and want to test the strengths of the locks,” Will had said, and this, Hannibal had smiled at. His intuitive, restless boy.

Hannibal’s plans regarding the museum are abstract; he’s read of it, of course – Palacio de la Inquicisión – and knows the history once held in its walls; monuments to the Inquisitors’ most brutal tortures. He holds only minimal optimism that there will be anything worth revisiting the venue for out of hours, knowing how these arcane objects tend to bypass the intricacies of elegance. Nevertheless, a temptation of history intertwined with blood and iron is excuse enough.

“Or, you’re trying to impress me and don’t want to risk exposing me to the mediocre,” Will had said. “Or, you’re just being cautious.”

Hannibal is still savouring the way Will had sounded hesitant when he said it; nerves and doubt creeping into the dips of his voice.

“Speaking of caution,” Will had said, his voice the only tool available to him, “The people who typically do...this sort of thing... generally advise against this.”

Hannibal can't keep the smile from his face as he thinks of how he'd left Will.

"I could injure myself," Will had told him, the confidence in his voice yielding to something closer to well-masked apprehension. "Cut off the circulation to my hands. Choke on my tongue. The villa could burn down."

Hannibal had assured him that none of these things would dissuade him from his current course of action. He'd moved the vibrating pear further away, too far for effective contact but still close enough to Will's balls to tease. He'd threatened to deepen the risk with a gag if Will didn't quieten himself, and that had been enough to slow the flurry of words from Will's drying mouth. He didn't reassure Will that he'd calculated the tension, the knots in the ropes, to be escapable at a push, nor of the knife hidden beneath the pillow, almost within reach, trusting that frustration and perseverance could prompt Will to figure it out, hoping that he wouldn't.

And so, that is how Hannibal had left Will; naked, arms stretched against the top bar of the headboard, legs splayed and muscles twitching, with a bloom of pink in his skin from the delicious indignity of it all.

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The Palacio de la Inquisición is decidedly lacking in brutality. Where once stood chairs of spikes, there now live dioramas depicting the mundanities of daily life under colonialism. Where any remnant of the violent history remains – a pillory brittled by age, an iron collar with a spike angled from sternum to chin, a stray noose in the courtyard – it's rendered immediately impotent by the accompanying explanatory text, speaking of apologies and shame of its visceral history. It reads as po-faced and insincere, and though Hannibal has not yet eliminated the idea of sharing the sights with Will, he finds himself gravely disappointed that he wasn't able to share his space in Florence, instead. He settles in a café some short streets away from the museum, and contemplates how best to transform his disappointment into a fresh opportunity.

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It's past dusk when Hannibal returns to the villa; and he fears that dehydration alone will have sped Will to find a way out of his restraints. As he parks his motorbike, Hannibal decides that if Will has indeed broken free and relieved himself of an afternoon's worth of tension, then he will delay their intimacies until such desperation can be resurrected. If instead Will remains, then he will tend to him with kindness, and then hold him hostage to his own libido. He knows which option he would prefer, his stomach already forming knots of tension in anticipation.

His first step through the front door tells him that something is amiss. The lights remain unlit, and the air smells wrong, somehow. Clogged. Deathly, and with an odour that isn't just Will's.

His heart holds its pace but seems to thump each beat more forcefully. Concern swells in his skin, unwelcome and yet utterly overwhelming. It's less the fear that something may have happened to Will, and more the powerlessness of not knowing.

He's shut the door behind him, dropped his bag and is reaching for the light switch as something, something raw and leaden and pungent with sweat tumbles the last feet of the stairs to land at his feet. He recoils.

"This," says a voice, cutting through the darkness and sounding both warm and seething. Hannibal's heartbeat softens at the sound. "This is why leaving me the way you left me is a bad idea, Hannibal."

Hannibal smiles despite himself.

"Unless this was one of your tests?"

"No," answers Hannibal, only faintly disappointed that he hadn't thought to introduce a challenge of this nature at this juncture. Light blooms into the room and the mass at his feet takes form; a contortion of limbs in dark clothing, and a head that sags over a red vent in a folded neck.

"Made you dinner," says Will.

Will descends the stairs, his bare legs coming into view beneath the hem of his bathrobe, and Hannibal's breath grows thick in his throat. The blue robe; a flimsy thing made for decoration, not warmth; is stained in blotches and sprays and stripes of red, still damp, and Will's face is streaked above it.

The idea that Will chose to cover himself with a robe before doing...whatever he did to the body at Hannibal's feet, it's disarming in itself. The slick, glinting stench of blood and death on Will's skin is worse than disarming. Hannibal feels himself unravelling so thoroughly that he misses Will's words completely, the first time they're spoken.

"Are there any rooms in this house where you don't store knives, Hannibal?"

Hannibal regains his senses for long enough to remember that he's still wearing his jacket, that he needs to answer Will.

"The bathroom?" Hannibal ventures. He's captivated, rendered insensible.

Will moves incrementally closer, watching Hannibal hang his coat with an expression masked by the red, still forming droplets in the ends of his hair and gathered on his eyebrows. The body lies between them, Will now on the lowest step of the staircase and looking down on Hannibal.

"You're not injured," Hannibal says.

"And you're disappointed," counters Will. There's no shake to his voice, no guilt or panic shaping his words.

"I'm relieved you're alive," Hannibal says, knowing the full breadth of life he's referring to. This is more than mere survival or struggle; Will is vivid.

There are practicalities to be addressed, Hannibal knows; the mystery assailant fouling up the air will need to be dealt with, his identity discovered, and the fresh risk this poses to them

will need to be reassessed.

Practicalities become inconsequential as Will steps over the drying body, and presses himself flush against Hannibal. The blood now smearing onto his shirt sleeves is of no concern, and neither is the knowledge that as Will balances himself, he's planting a sticky handprint onto the back of the door.

Fastidiousness belongs in certain situations, and this is not one of them. Learning that Will has managed to wreak destruction over another and has not yet found the relief from his earlier predicament is...it's something Hannibal doesn't have words for. Will's lips are on his and they taste of salt and iron and thirst. He's overwhelming, pressing into his thigh and Hannibal wishes fiercely that he had any control over this. As hands at his shirt collar drag him towards the hallway, to a flat space unobstructed by stairs or furniture, Hannibal is nothing but a series of reactions, responses, all of them urgent and starving.

Will's fingers slide around the buttons of Hannibal's shirt before deferring to haste, tugging each partition open. His eyes never leave Hannibal's, and the expression could chisel glass. Hannibal can't read him and he loathes not being able to understand, because it gives him nothing to dismantle.

He doesn't know how he's found himself with his back on the wooden floor, and he feels even less aware of the consequences of movement which lead to Will dragging his trousers from his heels, and only returns fully to the present when a memory strikes at him; something important, some connection made that he shouldn't be doing what he's about to do to Will, what Will is wordlessly commanding him to do to him. Will's teeth are at his neck and his tongue is at his ear and his hands are...his hands are about to pull him inside out if he continues.

He's dragging the open bathrobe from Will's shoulders and trying, reluctantly, to recall the specific barrier to him being able to twist Will onto his back and hammer him into the floorboards until neither of them are able to breathe. Will's wrists provide the answer; they're scratched, sore and yellowed from impact and Hannibal's reminded of injuries. The thought alone forces more pressure into his groin. The gun injury, still; rendering Will distressingly... impenetrable. Will's reaching for something tangled in the robe; a tube, the scent of its contents breathing into the room. Hannibal has to move his teeth from Will's chest to speak.

"Will, you can't."

Will's mouth stays fixed behind Hannibal's ear, voice so close it hums at the pitch of thought.

"You can't," Will corrects, and there are more words to follow and Hannibal doesn't think he wants to hear them but oh, god, he needs to. "I can."

The certainty of the word "can" has raised a heat inside Hannibal's skin that won't subside and he thinks that he should refute this; prove to Will that he can take what he needs from his mouth instead. No part of him can humour this idea for longer than a breath as Will places a wet finger against Hannibal's perineum.

Hannibal braces. He stays, perfectly still. The anticipation alone could be enough to break him, he thinks.

Will's finger doesn't move. He arches his head back, his throat presented to Hannibal's teeth, and he offers only one word.

“Well?”

Hannibal forces himself to breath. He nods his assent before he can find any reason not to.

The next moments form a vortex in his chest; it's more than the sensation of being pressed, of being opened, of being teased, damnit. It's a knowledge, roaring through the contractions and dilations of his flesh, that in this moment he belongs, utterly and entirely, to Will.

Will grips at his legs, claws into the meat of them, yanks Hannibal into the position he needs him in. Strokes softly at the hot skin of Hannibal's thighs. Hannibal locks his ankles behind Will's neck, not wanting to risk those wet hands doing anything as ordinary as holding him in position. All of him feels like a mouth, open and starved.

Blood tints the lubrication, and then the colour of it thins as more runs across Will's hands and onto, into him, and Hannibal wants to say that's enough, really – that he's ready. Will seems to hear him, smiles, and continues working his hands around Hannibal's entrance.

“Will.”

Will continues to massage, to press, to explore each flinch, sliding his hand away each time Hannibal tries to push himself into the contact despite himself. His free hand finds its way to Hannibal's chest, slicking the soft fur around his nipples. Hannibal raises a hand.

“No.”

It's a soft command. And somehow, impossibly, an unyielding one. Hannibal obeys, and when he feels the wrench of finger and thumb pulling at his nipple, he lets himself gasp. Will looks pleased and somehow, this is what Hannibal wants. He wants Will's pleasure, all of it. He wants Will to have everything.

Will's hands withdraw, and it's only for a moment but it's vast. Hannibal speaks before his mind can tell him not to.

“Please, Will.”

Will has never looked more lethal than in this moment. The contortion of bodies convenes in a hot chaos as Will presses himself inside Hannibal, steady jolts. It's almost, almost lacking friction. Then, he's moving; jerking and fucking and pushing. Hannibal's skin smacks against the floor as they gather pace, and he's held in motion by a hand gripping his own, pressing knuckles to the ground. They're a single entity, pulsing and grabbing and surging and sweating and there's still all this blood. Hannibal is clenching, too full and too desperate to feel the fear of being made so entirely vulnerable. Will seizes; catches himself and places a sticky, sweating palm against the wet head of Hannibal's cock.

“Go on,” Will says.

The spaces left inside Hannibal fill, compressed and consumed and something bursts and surges inside him, and there’s a pressure wrapped around his dick that no willpower could withstand. He comes, heavy and breathless. The pressure thins, eases the last of it out of him. He doesn’t recall closing his eyes, but when he opens them, the sight is divine.

Will is smiling. Easing Hannibal’s legs back to the floor with dextrous, tender motion, kneeling between them. Resting his hands on the insides of Hannibal’s shaking thighs, stroking, this time to soothe, not to provoke. He’s a vision; a riot of gloss and red and filth spread across him. The floor is too hard, and yet Hannibal has no incentive to leave his position on it in this moment. He reaches up to Will, pulls at his forearms until Will yields and crawls across his chest. Hannibal kisses him, then. Warm, slow. A different sort of hunger. They’re linked, in all the spaces their bodies allow them; arms over chests, legs knotted, fingers in hair and then on the bloodied smears of their jaws. Their breath being passed between lungs, and no words left to share.

They stay this way with the lights burning above them and don’t notice the transition from being awake into sleep; the bliss that comes with both remains constant.

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Poise

Chapter Summary

In which the deceased guest is helpful yet troublesome, and the spoils of Hannibal's trip to the torture museum get an airing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Morning, when it arrives, is abrasive. The stench of meat left to fester is present in every inhalation, and Hannibal's neck is stiffened almost beyond tolerance. The light – most of it artificial – is illuminating Will's blood-crusted arm, still draped across Hannibal's equally sullied chest and this, this is a small price to pay for the previous night's experience.

Hannibal tries to bask in the memory of it a little longer, to preserve the glow. A fly buzzes in his periphery. Will shifts, open mouthed, his hair congealed and stuck to his forehead, parted to show the shimmering line of scarring. Hannibal's scar. *His*. He reaches to move Will's arm from him, his own wrist scars catching the same glimmer of light. Will's scars, really. He hopes Will regards them as such. The movement snags; hairs left to solidify in the calm of sleep now ungently untangled. Will stirs again, and Hannibal watches as the calm is steadily blinked from his eyes.

“Good morning, Will.”

Will's voice has yet to catch up, but his nose twitches, and then scrunches.

Hannibal extricates himself fully from Will's soft hold, standing to face the day as he watches Will unfurling, moving to stand with the grace of a newborn calf.

They're a mess. An exquisite mess in the night time, but in this moment, they are simply standing wreckage.

Will is the first to speak the word “shower,” and Hannibal is not prepared to wait for Will to get clean before he can peel the grime from his own skin.

They have to step over the body of the previous night's assailant to get there – and all Will says is, “We need to talk about that.”

They've reached the shower before Hannibal offers a reply.

“The meat will have spoiled by now.”

Will's expression is unreadable. He doesn't challenge, nor seem appalled. Just closes his eyes as he sets the shower speed to full and invites Hannibal to share the modest space with him. His body language has become something more fluid, in contrast to Hannibal's sleep-stiffened bones. Will seems more in control, somehow; Hannibal finds himself biting back a kind of jealousy, as Will forms a lather of gel and begins massaging it into Hannibal's scalp. As though Will experienced another metamorphosis, but one that Hannibal didn't own.

He reciprocates the cleansing, considering it a baptism of uncertainties. He manoeuvres Will to face the wall and lathes his back, massaging and scrubbing and then angling the flow of water over it until it clears of suds. All that remains is Will, the indents and sculpts of muscle glistening beneath his touch. Will would still look this majestic whether Hannibal was there to witness it or not, and this tiny unwelcome thought nips at a part of Hannibal's mind that he'd like to keep closed. *Will can only exist with him.* Will continues to wash his own skin, to dissolve the death still ground into the pores, and the distance between them grows, for a moment. He steadies into the feeling of hands against his arms, on his own back, washing him, *worshipping* him. He begins to feel whole again when Will's fingers skim across the brand burnt around his spine, and he breathes fully when they're facing each other again. He dips Will's head beneath the flow of water, rummaging fingers across his scalp and unpicking the tendrils of hair until the water runs clear. The need for scrubbing subsides, and some time after that, so does the need to be immersed in the hot flow of water, and each other.

The break in noise, between the stopping of the water and the starting of Will's pragmatism, is a short one.

"Alana and Margot know where we are," he says, swathing himself in a towel.

"I see."

Will is slow to elaborate, and it takes until the two of them are dressed for any substantial details of the revelation to emerge.

"We have at least one advantage," Will says, masterfully hiding his revulsion at the swelling stench of rot. He's walking towards the kitchen, stepping once again over the congealing form of their would-be assailant.

"It's that they don't have law enforcement to help them, this time. They're...outsourcing."

Hannibal follows him, wondering momentarily how Will is able to dissociate his senses from each other well enough to drink water without gagging from the smell.

"I'd suggest," Hannibal offers, "that our other advantage comes from our guest."

The hitch of Will's eyebrow is an expectation of more detail.

"No one," Hannibal explains, "would willingly assault their olfactory senses so unkindly in order to enter our villa right now. Therefore, we are very likely safe."

Already, the logistical and biological equations of body disposal are blooming within his mind. This one, technically, is Will's to deal with. He suspects that Will may disagree.

Then, they're outside, the morning sun well risen and the air significantly clearer.

Will leads the conversation, as he has led Hannibal since they woke. It is simultaneously enchanting and unnerving; Hannibal does not feel comfortable being led. There may be more pressing matters to address, but the disorientation of an apparently shifting dynamic is a distraction.

Will is recalling the information he's gathered from their guest's phone. He's explaining how their guest, a naïve man named Georg, had been warned – in threads of messages, all still saved to his device despite the instructions he'd received to delete them – not to enter the villa. That Georg had been instructed only to report back on the locks, the security, the timekeeping and the habits of the two men.

Hannibal catches himself smiling when Will recounts the messages in which Alana had warned him, specifically, not to underestimate Will.

Will only falters on his words when he mentions the pictures that Georg had captured of his brief stalking of their property. Somewhere, on their rotting guest's phone, exists the photographic memory of Will embraced in rope. It's not a clear photo, Will says. But it's clear enough. There's a flush in his cheeks as he admits that yes, that photo has been sent back, as evidence.

"I imagine Alana is experiencing regret," Hannibal says, and nothing of what he says next is employed as a comfort. "Perhaps if she knew of your proclivities before, she may have sought to explore them. And our lives may have taken a very different course."

Will is rendered silent.

Their old lives are not to be teased or spoken of. Illuminating the past, and the many opportunities it could have held had Hannibal not sabotaged every one, is recklessly unkind.

Hannibal knows this, and he also knows that his promise to kill Alana is one that Will has yet to embrace. One flippant suggestion of a life impossible and unreachable, and Will is very nearly wilting in the face of it. Or, he is merely ashamed. Either way, Hannibal seems satisfied. He can feel his grasp of their situation strengthening.

"Did you know what he'd seen of you before you killed him?" Hannibal asks, beginning to enjoy himself. "Or did you only discover it after you'd bled him?"

Will glowers, then.

"After."

"A pity," Hannibal says. "I imagine it would have been more satisfying, had you known exactly what you were killing."

"This sounds like projection, Hannibal."

If Hannibal were being considerate, he would abandon this line of conversation before Will's posture becomes any more defensive. Being Hannibal, he does not care for consideration in

this moment.

“Tell me. How does it feel to know that you’ve been seen?”

When Will speaks, it’s tight.

“The threat of being seen can be...enticing,” he answers carefully. His lashes flicker across his eyes, fanning his gaze. “The reality of it is far less so.”

“You fear that they may judge you?”

Will laughs at that. Judgement is not theirs to bear, in any circumstance.

“Then you simply do not wish to share,” Hannibal conjectures, and Will nods.

“Or to be shared,” Will agrees.

“Then perhaps I need to reclaim you.”

Their hands join; a fluid motion, instigated by each of them simultaneously. The concern of losing his grasp, metaphorically, is quick to subside.

“First,” Will says, “We should probably do something about our guest.”

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It takes them much of the day, and three more showers, to deal with their guest. Will had been adamant that there should be nothing grandiose about his presentation; this was to be desecration only. Hannibal had agreed; suggesting that any messages Georg could be used to convey could be captured in photograph alone, and then his physical form could be obliterated.

The pictures, they save to Georg’s phone.

The rest of him, what’s left once the ribs have been scraped clean and the putrefying pulp of his innards have been excavated, is dismantled beneath a bone saw – until the remains are of a disposable size.

There will be no tableau, of this one.

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The poolside air is warm, still, even in the starlight.

“We could be being watched, now,” Will says, refilling his wine glass for the second time.

It’s not a welcome thought, but it doesn’t worry at Hannibal’s brow the way it does Will’s.

Will is in dire need of distraction. It’s rational, of course; Will is private to a fault. To have his secrets shared so boldly, without his permission or involvement, is an offense. It’s only natural that Will should be frustrated.

“We could leave,” Will continues. His voice is relaxed, almost deliberately so. “Find another space to make our own. Let Alana and Margot start their hunt anew.”

“Then the hunt continues to be a hunt,” Hannibal counters, “And we the hunted.”

Will nods, almost dismissive. “Whether we run, or chase, or wait,” he says, and his wine is half sunk already. “We’re not in control of the outcome.”

“You exerted plenty of control yesterday,” Hannibal says. He watches a smile creep into Will’s expression. They may have been discovered, but Hannibal is confident that the good doctor will delay sending fresh assailants to their villa for a while yet. Which means he can focus on what matters in the now, which is the flush in Will’s cheek, the heady warmth in his skin, and his own curiosity.

Will thumbs the stem of his wine glass. The way he watches Hannibal, it’s as though he’s reading him. Dismantling him, perhaps. It’s disconcerting.

“You want to know if I’ve...changed,” Will says. He’s still got that loose, gentle smile. “Because of yesterday.”

Hannibal does want to know, desperately. He wants to know if the previous night’s experience is one he can embrace again. He would, willingly. Enthusiastically, even. He also does not wish to relinquish the many holds he has over Will, the ones that have him held in his thrall like so many hooks through skin. In truth, he wants it all. He chooses, instead of admitting any such doubt, to dodge the question.

“You’ve killed before,” he says.

Will only stares at him, quietly demanding a better answer.

“Do you wish to have changed?” Hannibal tries.

“Tell me what *you* want, Hannibal.”

The more stubborn Will becomes, the more confident he appears, the more Hannibal wants to drag it out of him, kicking and bleeding if he must, if only to watch it regrow inside Will’s skin with more fury than before. He wants – *needs* – to creep inside Will and hold his suffering close. To inebriate himself on just the sight of him breaking under his hand.

He also very much wants to know if Will would allow it, still. Rationally, he should; the needs and hungers that Will has shared with him so far can hardly be dismissed. And yet, with Will, there is never anything as simple as certainty.

Words are inadequate. If Will is to understand, and if Will is to cease putting him on the backfoot, he needs to be shown. Then, he can choose how to respond. Hannibal picks their wine glasses off the table, and walks purposefully inside.

Will follows. And, when Hannibal asks him to, he waits, seating himself in the open arena of their lounge. Only when Hannibal returns, some moments later and carrying a bag that clinks,

does Will open his mouth to speak. He's interrupted before his tongue curls around the first syllable.

"You never asked what I thought of the museum," Hannibal says. Conversational, and mild.

Will's mouth opens again, as though to defend his inattentiveness or offer some rebuke, perhaps to suggest that *slicing the life out of a stranger had taken precedence over asking Hannibal how his day had been*. Again, Hannibal speaks before Will has a chance to.

"Truthfully, I had considered sharing it with you," he tells Will. He has his rapt attention. "It wasn't like Florence. But it had things I believe we could both have enjoyed."

Will registers something at the mention of Florence. A guess as to the nature of the museum, if he hadn't already been aware.

"Past tense," Will observes. "Meaning the potential to...*enjoy* it...no longer exists?"

The contents of the bag remain obscured from Will as Hannibal carefully empties them onto the wooden flooring, resting them behind a large plush footstool.

"In light of your recent exposure," Hannibal says, and he's basking in the glow of Will's cheeks at the mention of it, "I decided that making use of their contraptions after hours may be a step too far."

Each potential scenario appears to unfold behind Will's eyes. "Too far? For *you*?"

Hannibal has his answer, in this. Will may have skirted any admission of where his preference for violence currently rests, but he's not as subtle as he'd like to be. The thirst that paints the room at the mere allusion to *contraptions*, to *vulnerability*, is the invitation Hannibal has been hoping for. Will shifts his posture.

"I merely thought that strapping you to a rack in a public space might be inappropriate."

"*Hannibal*."

Hannibal is rejuvenated by Will's indignation. He suggests, firmly, that Will considers divesting himself of clothes. When Will glances to the broad, open windows behind him, Hannibal tells him to pay them no mind. When Will stands, reaches for the handles of the shutters anyway, Hannibal moves with the speed of a wildcat and has Will's wrists in his grasp and his skin at his teeth, and Will's breath thinning in anticipation.

"Pay them no mind," Hannibal repeats.

The routine of obedience, never given without challenge, begins. Will sheds his clothes with his back to the window, eyeing the space behind the stool with only the mildest of apprehension.

"Is this what you want?" he asks Hannibal. It's not accusatory, this time. As though he fears being selfish, in continuing to take. Guilt is not a thing Hannibal wants in this scenario, from Will or from himself.

“Of course.”

Will nods, and he stirs, as though he'd been waiting for permission to let arousal bloom within him. He kneels, at Hannibal's request.

The first item is held up for him to inspect, the scent of leather strong from its smooth surface. It's a collar, at least a hand-width in length at the curved V of its front, sculpted into a wave. Its appearance is almost that of a medical brace, were it not also adorned with metal fixtures and pivots; the kind that are seldom used for aiding a person's physical health.

“Something from the museum gift shop?” Will asks. He's lighting up with want, with hunger for his imminent degradation.

“A form of incentive,” Hannibal says, beckoning Will to rest his throat on its inside. “For you to claim your power back.”

Will swallows as the collar closes around him. It's a little tighter than snug, and the sides of it press into the edges of his jaw, and down into his collarbone. Looking downwards, once the last buckle is secured at his nape, is not an accomplishable feat. His chin is held higher than comfort would permit, and already, speech is becoming an obstacle. He attempts it, despite this. Testing his limits.

“This isn't you taking my power,” he tells Hannibal. “You know this.”

Hannibal is already enjoying the way Will's words are strained. How his jaws can't open wide enough for the full breadth of vowel sounds to escape.

“Of course it is,” Hannibal says, and he's telling Will to open his mouth wider. When Will tries to say that he can't, that's when Hannibal pushes the grey ball of a gag just past his teeth. The straps to hold it in place loop beneath his ears and rest against the back of the collar.

Will continues to test his capacity for movement; arms twisting behind his back to see what can be unhooked, clenching and unclenching his jaw to see if there's any give, at all. There isn't.

Hannibal is pleased.

“See?” he asks Will, pulling the footstool towards them both and manoeuvring Will so that he's facing the window. “Fold your arms behind your back, please.”

Will doesn't. He's still fidgeting, still deciding how fully to give in to this. Hannibal suspects that the gag is more of an issue for him than the collar; it's the one tool that Will consistently resists, and it's the one that has the greatest success at limiting the influence he can have over Hannibal. Therefore, its use in this instance is essential.

He yanks at Will's arms instead, as though to illustrate that cooperation would have been more pleasant, and curses himself inwardly; Will only appears to revel more deeply in the rougher handling. As he always has, and as Hannibal should have known he would. When he

ties Will's forearms, fingers to elbow, he's deliberately gentle in contrast, though it strains against his instincts. He keeps the silk wrapping firm, but allows for no friction.

Will stretches and pulls at it, checking the security of it, letting out a low, wet sigh as he accepts the lack of movement. He's tilted over the footstool, and Hannibal mirrors the softness of touch when he wraps Will's thighs to it as a tether. It's not much of an anchor, but he's confident that there will be little scope for movement when he's done.

Then, he shows Will the final implement he intends to use.

"The museum may have been a disappointment," Hannibal explains, feeling the weight of the spike as he rolls it across his fingers. "But it was not without inspiration. Head up, please, Will."

Will does as he's asked, this time. Or rather, tries to. All attempts to lift his chin higher only push the collar into the back of his skull, and down into the knotting muscles of his back. Already, a glisten is forming around his collarbones from the trapped heat, and the exertion of muscles fighting the immovability of the collar.

The spike in Hannibal's hands, it's a quarter inch wide and pointed at both ends. He holds it up to Will's raised eyeline to demonstrate. Then, he presses it into the pad of his own thumb. It's not quite knife sharp, but with a very small amount of pressure, it draws blood.

Will blinks, appearing to understand. When the spike has been fixed to the front of the collar, Will's understanding is amplified. The vicious thing is swivelled, then twisted and locked into position, one end nestled just beneath his chin, the other catching at the skin beneath his clavicle. He makes a single grunt of protest as Hannibal pushes him downwards, so his stomach rests across the footstool but the rest of him lies out, stretched and unsupported. The faintest hint of a tremble is already present in Will's skin and this, Hannibal knows, is the effect he truly wanted. Beyond the suffering, and the resilience, there's a whisper of fear.

Will won't be able to sustain this for long. Any point that Hannibal wishes to make will have to be made before Will can puncture too large a hole in himself.

And time, he knows, is moving very differently for Will right now. Saliva is rapidly pooling at the sides of his stretched mouth. For Hannibal it is mere seconds for the weight of it to be summoned by gravity, to sploot onto the floor, a trail still strung to Will's teeth. The movement Will makes to shift it; it's barely a rustle, hardly visible. But that small gesture will have shifted the angle of sharp metal against skin, will have nudged at the collar, and will be burning fresh tension into Will's tensed shoulders. The devil is in the details.

"We may indeed be being watched," Hannibal says conversationally, though he doesn't truly believe it. He moves a chair close to Will, facing his profile, and seats himself in it. He can reach Will with his feet this way, should he wish to.

"Consider, how that would feel," Hannibal continues, waiting for a reaction, a sound thicker than Will's careful, measured breathing. Will is hard, still. "The eyes of an audience on you, witnessing your debasement."

Will's eyes close, and Hannibal feels denied.

"Perhaps they'd simply be entertained," Hannibal continues. "Or perhaps, they'd enjoy you more this way. They may feel you deserve it."

Will flinches, and his breath stutters. His eyes scrunch, then open.

There's no opportunity to grip anything for balance, the way Will is held, but his fingers are twisting at the silk. This movement, it's a little more than a shudder. It knots and contorts at Will's back, through the blades of his shoulders. His chin raises, barely, and it falls. Hannibal smells the blood before he sees it; a pearl, small and red and perfect.

Hannibal has his verbal hook, and so he twists it.

"Cruelty can't help but find an audience in you, Will."

Will's back is reddening with the strain of holding himself in place, glistening and tense. Despite his stubborn strength, the smallest tip of the spike is now burrowed into his chin. Hannibal watches as Will makes every attempt to steel himself against the impossible, studies the grip of his thighs against the low stool, and watches as the inevitable cramps climb through his limbs. Moments pass, and Will's breaths grow damp and hurried. It would be so easy, to touch him like this. To turn this into gratification, but this is not the experience Hannibal wishes for them, tonight. This is endurance.

"There are so many who'd want to take something from you," he tells Will. "Because of who you are, because of what you've done..."

A sound breaks from behind the spit-wetted gag, like something crackling or gasping. Will's nose is running and his eyes are glossed, and brimming. From his jaw, blood forms a thin ribbon across the spike, and what remains swells into beads caught against follicles, until the weight pulls it to the floor where it mixes with the saliva pooled there.

"And there are those," Hannibal continues, listening carefully for the pitch and thickness of Will's breathing, "who would only wish to hurt you, because they can."

Hannibal illustrates the ease with which this can be done, by gently nudging the toe of his shoe into Will's chest. Just enough that Will shakes, and when he shakes, the slow drizzle of blood thickens. And more than that, the brim in his eyes spills over. *Delicious*.

Hannibal barely has control over himself. He needs to, because Will is growing soft as the agony takes over, and it would take very little for his situation to escalate beyond dire. Hannibal's attention needs to be on him, fully.

"Each of them," and he's careful not to name *them*, confident that Will can default to the most humiliating incarnation of an audience, "would do as they wished to you, and discard you. Letting them see you like this –"

The sound Will makes would be a scream, if it had a clear path to the air. Instead, it's more of a protracted, gurgled wail.

Hannibal is checking with discreet urgency that Will is breathing, still, that he's not fully pierced his own jaw or sternum, that he's not in danger. And he's pretending, expertly, that he isn't. He's reassured; Will is...not fine, but neither is he damaging past repair. There remains some stamina in him yet, though he is now entirely soft, his hair damp about his scalp from sweat, and the puddle of bloodied drool beneath him slowly swelling.

"It would be of no matter," continues Hannibal, and he offers Will the smallest of reprieves; he weaves his fingers into his damp hair and for a few long seconds, he holds Will that way. Supports the weight of him and absorbs the thrum of gratitude and the raised pitch of Will's breathing.

"Because no matter how any of them see you, or use you..."

Hannibal lets go, and watches the spike pressing fresh angles into the opened skin at chin and chest. He lets Will flounder, fully, before he'll reassure him. He needs Will to know how *much* he is enduring. This can only work for as long as Will insists on holding himself in place, and Hannibal needs Will to pass the point where that feels possible.

That point is fast approaching. The sounds Will is making sound entirely involuntary, now. Howls, and gritted gasps, and this is prompt enough.

"They can never have you. Because no matter who sees you, wherever you are, Will, you're entirely mine. Always."

The words effect a physical change in Will; the tremble softens to a wilt. As his shoulders weaken, their support of his neck wanes. The bite of metal forces Will to regather his strength, but it's not forthcoming. He's moments from collapse.

Hannibal considers, for a short but glorious moment, finding a way to suspend Will in this limbo for longer; to keep him just within the boundaries of safety, just to prolong this. Without the intention of sexual gratification, this time, there is more freedom as to their chosen end point of this experience. Instead, he chooses to make one final point.

"Tell me, Will. Do you accept that you are, in this moment, without power?"

Will says *something*, but it doesn't emerge in the form of words. Words are not how Hannibal wants his answer.

The next sound Will makes sounds like "O", and the one after that is like a sob trying to tear at the back of his throat.

"Don't try to speak." It sounds almost kind, the way Hannibal says it. Almost. "Nod if you agree, Will."

Will is stubbornly, beautifully still, barring the soft shake in his muscles and the now freely running flow of tears.

"Very well," Hannibal answers, and stands to leave. It's a bluff, of course, and he expects Will to see it as such. He's surprised by the visceral sound of protest, an almost audible

please.

“Nod if you accept that you are wholly without power, and I will release you. Otherwise, stay as you are.”

The next sound Will makes could be a laugh, but for the way it catches and clenches at his neck and forces his eyes to shut and squeeze out moisture.

The contradiction stands between them; for as long as he is still asking Will for a response, Will is not powerless. Will knows, even in his unravelled state, that Hannibal needs this from Will, and therein lies the strength of him. But it also carries Will's pride, and if he can take nothing else from Will this evening, he will have this from him.

“Show me you understand, Will,” he coaxes. He's kneeling next to Will, now, breath hot on his back.

For Hannibal, time is still moving too fast, barely enough to truly savour.

For Will, the moment between defiance and defeat stretches and tears.

All of him is searing strength; he opens his eyes and arches his head as far back as he can, and it's minuscule, the distance. But it's the first half of his agreement. Then, Will drops his head back down, tries to angle his chin as evenly as the collar allows, and the metal catches a new patch of skin, and skids against his red rawed chest. It's as close to a gesture of affirmation as he's able to make. He understands, and Hannibal is satisfied.

The collar is unbuckled before Hannibal pulls the spike free, feeling the resistance of freshly pierced dermis dragging against the exiting metal.

“Thank you, Will.”

The gag is unclasped next, and pulled from Will's locked jaw, thick with saliva. Will gasps breath into his lungs, heaving at the air as Hannibal wipes at his face.

Hannibal kneels behind him, pulls his back towards him to unpick the knots holding his arms, and unhitching the loops of fabric from his thighs. When Will folds backwards into him, wordless and exhausted, Hannibal holds him, close and tight. One arm wrapped across arm and midriff, the other holding his head. Will sags into the warm cove of Hannibal's body, resting his hands across Hannibal's clothed knees. Now that he's able to speak again, he doesn't seem inclined to. He's endured, beautifully. The weight of earlier worries has fallen from him, and he's a soft, pliant thing in Hannibal's arms. Content, and as peaceful as Hannibal has ever seen him when awake.

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This time, Hannibal is careful. He has no desire to spend a second night on the wooden floor, and even less desire to alienate Will after his exquisite display of vulnerability. Will may be capable of walking himself upstairs, though Hannibal pre-empts him by scooping him from

the floor. Will loops his arms around Hannibal's neck to allow it. Balance, it seems, is restored.

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Chapter End Notes

Feel free to say hi on twitter! @muffichka

Heat

Chapter Summary

In which Hannibal ventures into town.

Days pass, and the Colombian heat thickens. It's claustrophobic, and is having a disadvantageous effect on Will's choices of attire; today, a lurid pink vest top, and his favoured pair of blue shorts. The ensemble requires a substantial degree of self-awareness and decorum to remain decent, which Will does not exhibit. As a result, Hannibal is finding himself perpetually compromised by the very sight of him. Disappointingly, Will is reluctant to invite Hannibal's affections. He is still mending, and worse than that, he's anxious.

"We could try and contact the other people in Georg's phone," Will suggests. "Find out where they found him, at least."

It's the seventh reference he's made to the contents of the phone, and each new plan seems more tenuous than the last. The phone numbers Georg used to contact Margot and Alana are disconnected, now, and the email address had bounced back a delivery failure. They've exhausted all other avenues of pursuit or flight; all that remains is to wait.

Hannibal finds this acceptable; he is in no need to rush things. He dismisses Will's suggestion, passing him a glass of elderflower over crushed ice. Hannibal made his promise, that Alana's life was his, though has made no move to act on it. By seeking him out, the murderous wives are merely bringing the resolution of this debt to him; how it will unfold cannot be determined, until it is determined. Worrying serves nothing.

"You won't go back on it, will you," Will says, more statement than question. He's more sprawled than seated on the lounge, all knotted heat and restlessness. Hannibal is certain that there are ways he can ease the stress from Will's bones if he would only permit it. He allows himself to imagine it; sees himself beating Will boneless and breathless, and imagines the beautiful pivot between defiance and submission, given through sweat, tears and blood. Will is not permitting it, yet.

And so, Hannibal feels he must answer the heavy question in the air.

"We are defined by our intentions," Hannibal says, "so, to renege on those would be to undermine the very integrity of our identity."

"Integrity and pride are not the same thing, Hannibal."

Each time they visit this conversation, the outcome rarely changes. Will never goes as far as to ask him, directly, not to harm Alana, nor Margot, nor their son. He knows, intimately, that pleas for mercy are not something Hannibal will respond favourably to. And Hannibal never goes as far as asking Will if he would share the knife, should it come to it. If he could kill for a reason beyond necessity. Instead, they remain at an impasse. Neither satisfied, nor decided. They allow the silence to fill with the sounds around them; the whirs of distant traffic and the chirrups and cheets of wildlife.

Will interrupts the background symphony, looking directly at Hannibal for the first time since their conversation began. “Is this your idea of dressing casually?”

Hannibal is only mildly affronted. It has been some days since Will has chided him for his fussy habits, and the change in tone is refreshing.

“My clothing is quite weather appropriate.” And then, because Will is displaying open amusement at the detail that all but one of the buttons on Hannibal’s shirt is fastened, he elaborates. “We are almost out of groceries and I thought I would spare the good citizens of Cartagena a view of my genitalia when I go to restock.” He’s staring pointedly at Will’s shorts.

Will’s laughter is light, and loose, and all the things he’s missed seeing in Will through the haze of anxiety that’s befallen him these last days.

“I’m not dressed for the good citizens of Cartagena, Hannibal. I’m dressed for...hundred degree heat and the least possible movement.”

Hannibal feigns relief, refilling Will’s glass and smoothing the top of his trousers. “Thank god,” he says. “I feared you may be considering accompanying me. I don’t wish to be seen as the sort of man who employs escorts for his errands.”

“Hannibal.”

It’s fond, the way Will says it. The indignation is a performance, further cementing Hannibal’s theory that Will is entirely aware of the effect he is having with his shocking lack of discretion. He considers invoking the possibilities of him being captured on camera again, but decides against it.

He’s ready to leave when Will stands – or rather, unfurls from the lounge – and places a soft, hot kiss against his jaw.

“Be safe,” Will tells him.

Hannibal is thoroughly disarmed by the sincerity of Will’s easy gesture. He returns it, though his lips only catch the tip of Will’s ear and some of his hair, and he finds himself reassuring Will that he himself is more of a threat than anyone he may encounter. Will is already seated back down by the time Hannibal leaves, eyes drawn back to the tablet.

There’s a low thrill in Hannibal’s stomach, and he’s only slightly alarmed that it took nothing more than affection to stir it. He is not accustomed to feeling cared for.

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Within ten minutes of entering the bustle of the city centre, Hannibal is regretting the density of his olive cotton shirt. He is almost entirely comprised of perspiration, and infuriation. He has already counted no fewer than five dinner-worthy offences from people with no regard for personal space or apologies, and there are two people in the butcher's shop who he considers dispatching on the basis of their disregard for personal hygiene alone.

There is very little to find delight in, and his shopping is completed within a disappointingly short span of time. He buys no more than he can balance on the motorbike, which he thinks might be the only thing preventing him from kidnapping a particularly obnoxious tourist if only to teach her some more polite ways of interacting with the market vendors. It's when he emerges from the charcuterie that his breathing stills; across the bustling square, he sees a gloss of dark hair and a cloud of auburn. He refocuses, and the heads turn and become simply strangers.

Perhaps, he is not as impervious to worry as he thought.

In the short walk to his motorbike, he counts a further four prospective Alanas, and three Margots. The heat, he reasons, is probably affecting his senses. Though, he is no longer entirely dismissive of the suggestion to consider retiring their villa and letting the hunt renew itself from a greater distance. Will's gentle warning to him, to be safe, spurs him homewards.

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When Hannibal arrives home, his shirt is sticking to him, his necklace pressing close against the heat of his chest, and his hair is a solid mat against his skull. He has no desire to be seen by Will in this way, and so he darts to the shower before he can risk interaction. He emerges, some blissfully cool minutes later, and sets about composing himself.

It's only after he's restocked the fridge and applied a generous lemon, dill and garlic dressing to the scallops he'd chosen for dinner, that he registers something being decidedly amiss.

The jug of elderflower still sits on the counter in the kitchen, the ice long since melted and the volume of it not depleted since he left. There are no sounds inside the walls of the villa to suggest another's presence. And outside, the poolside loungers are conspicuously empty.

Pretending not to panic, Hannibal investigates each room of the house in turn. First he looks for Will, and then finding each space bereft, for anything that could be missing. No clothes, no money and no papers have been moved from their positions.

It's possible that Will could have ventured outside out of mere curiosity. He thinks of the clothes Will had been barely wearing, and winces internally at the thought. There are few places he could get to on foot, and fewer where he'd be welcome; scarred and barely versed in the local language, and with none of the currency that could afford him any meaningful freedom. Meaning that the chances of Will having willingly absconded are limited, at best.

He tries calling Will's name, in case his voice could be enough to summon him from the ether. The air remains still, and silent, and the weight of Hannibal's loneliness pushes against

his lungs. Though the circumstances may yet be a mystery, the result is unavoidable, and dreadful: Will is gone.

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To Hell With Good Intentions

Chapter Summary

In which Hannibal weighs his pride against his common sense.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal is not faring well. The passage of time is a thing he is beginning to view as a personal affront; what use is time, if it doesn't carry with it the things that give it meaning?

Hannibal has been making deductions. Firstly, he has deduced that Will is almost certainly alive. Were he not, he imagines that he would have returned to their home to find an altogether more disturbing sight. His mind helpfully supplies him with examples regardless; images of the swimming pool dyed red, of bullet holes in foreheads, and none of the intimacy that Will deserves. Each imagining causes a yawning gape in his gut that grows until he feels hollowed by it.

He has also deduced, through the occasional lapses into excruciating doubt and loneliness, that if Will is alive, and being held somewhere, that it must be for a purpose. Whether the purpose is bait, blackmail or to simply torture Hannibal with not knowing, is yet to be decided.

Other details Hannibal has learnt have been around the logistics of Will's disappearance. There is a person-shaped disruption to the shape of the Plumeria hedge at the edge of their property. From the light trampling of the foliage around it, and the shed petals of red, Hannibal guesses that Will was likely pulled through it, with minimal struggle, to whatever vehicle would have been waiting on the road beyond.

The lack of struggle bothers Hannibal. He finds himself worrying that Will would have let his guard down at the sight of Margot or Alana, and then he finds himself rationalising away from this conclusion; there's not a hint of their scents on the air. It is infinitely more likely that Will was removed by a proxy, or by proxies. On the basis of pride alone, he hopes that it took more than one person to overpower him.

As the second day of Will's absence begins to ebb at Hannibal's nerves, he comforts himself with thoughts of how Will may be being ill-handled, imagining instead himself in the position of perpetrator. Though the fantasies are abstract, they speed the feelings of loss, and of jealousy that it will be someone else's hands on Will. The wine he pours for himself tastes faintly sour.

He'd be better at interpreting the residues of clues and the promises of motives, if Will were here with him.

It's late evening, when the cloying heat gives way to light breezes and the moon sits high above, reflected in the unearthly neons of the pool. Georg's phone, never far from Hannibal's hands, starts strobing with an incoming call. Hannibal clenches; he does not feel composed. He waits, 3 flashes of the screen, then answers in his most attentive voice. There's a pause, first. And then, Alana.

"Hello, Hannibal."

When Hannibal answers that it's good to hear her voice, he is being entirely sincere.

"Are you phoning to tell me that you have something of mine?" he asks.

Alana's laugh is calm, smooth, and utterly controlled. It is not the laughter of somebody who's killed her former friend, nor is it the mirth of one who's been immediately threatened by him.

"If this were anyone else," she says, "I'd challenge them referring to another person as a possession to be collected."

"I am not anyone else," points out Hannibal.

"Quite."

Hannibal waits for another prompt from Alana, but she is not forthcoming. She holds all cards in this moment, therefore it falls upon Hannibal to pry any of them from her.

"Am I to barter with you to spare Will from death, or torture perhaps?" he asks.

None of the amusement has left Alana's voice, and Hannibal almost wants to applaud her for it, though he suspects it would be ill received if he did.

"We're in no rush to kill him," Alana says.

"Torture, then?"

This time, there's an echo to Alana's laugh. *Margot*.

"You'd enjoy that too much," Alana tells Hannibal. "Probably, so would he. There are other means." There's no judgement in her tone; she's entirely conversational when she informs Hannibal that it's fortunate it was Will they were handed. "Had it been you," she clarifies, "the outcome might have been very different."

"You forgive Will for the very things you condemn in me."

"Will didn't make a promise to kill me, Hannibal." The levity has dropped out of her voice. "This has nothing to do with moral judgements."

Hannibal finds himself smiling. He truly has missed Alana, and he finds her verbal sparring invigorating. “Then you feel safe keeping him in your company?” he asks. A simple threat, and not one he is wholly qualified to make; if Will has managed no violence thus far, he doubts he has any planned. He is nothing if not hopeful.

“Will has been a well behaved guest,” Alana assures him. She offers no further insight into the terms of his good behaviour. “We’re prepared to keep him, for as long as we need to.”

Hannibal wonders how Will would feel, being spoken of as a currency to be wagered against. He suspects it would not be entirely unenjoyable, as a concept. Missing the opportunity to explore this more directly with Will, he returns to the more immediate matter.

“You keeping Will from me will not dissuade me from honouring my promise, Alana.”

Alana is sharp, now. Lethal, and unyielding. “I wouldn’t doubt it,” she agrees.

Hannibal is momentarily gripped by a deeply unpleasant thought, one which he feels the need to voice, lest the notion grows roots in silence. “You sound remarkably confident in your own safety,” he says, a tip of poison on his tongue. “Are you perhaps planning a new addition to the family?”

There’s silence, for a moment. When Alana’s voice returns, it’s akin to the sound of glass cracking into ice.

“You have a profound inability to protect any child whose life touches yours, Hannibal. Bartering my uterus against your nature would be suicide.”

Hannibal is momentarily stunned. He’d intended to goad, and to reassure himself that Will hadn’t been persuaded to fatherhood, again. Instead, he finds himself confronted by emotions which he’d intended to keep dormant. He’s still grappling to find the words that would help him regain his footing, and Alana beats him to it.

“You can have Will,” she says, and now Hannibal is less interested in regaining any lost control, because Alana has the bait and all he needs now is the hook to impale himself on. “If you rescind your promise to me.”

Hannibal will do no such thing. “A promise is more than the words that are spoken,” he offers. “It can no more be unmade than a person’s nature can.”

“You’ve unmade plenty of natures,” Alana says. “It’s pride that’s keeping you tied to your words. You made another promise too, Hannibal. You promised you’d save him.”

“And I did,” he answers. The definition of *saving* has become something oft disputed by Will, but to Hannibal’s mind, he has honoured this in numerous ways.

“Saving a person isn’t a one time thing. I’m going to text you a number,” she tells him, avoiding a discussion around semantics. “We’ll keep the phone for three days. You can contact us, confirm that the promise no longer stands, and you’ll be reunited with your... *beloved*, and we can go our separate ways.”

“Or?” ventures Hannibal.

“After the three days, we leave the country. With Will. We’ll check in, twice a year. Until you change your mind.”

“And you would trust in my word?” Hannibal asks. “I could lie to you this minute, say that I no longer plan to kill you –”

“You wouldn’t dishonour the aesthetic of your agreement,” Alana tells him. She is incisively accurate in her assessment; any plans Hannibal has to bring Will back hinge on it.

He has one last play to offer, and it’s neither smart nor convincing, to either of them. But, it’s the only thing he can summon in order to feel as though he hasn’t been entirely undermined during the conversation. And so, he speaks it.

“You understand the importance of aesthetics,” he says, “so you should also understand that I would find blackmail unspeakably ugly. Keep him.”

With that, he disconnects the call and is only faintly surprised to see his fingers shaking.

He’s made a terrible mistake.

•

Hannibal enters the halls of his memory palace. Partially, it’s a reprieve from what he assumes must be a form of anxiety; his hands are sweating – more than just heat – and he’s perpetually restless and joyless. He wonders if this is how Will feels. There is a broader intention to being here; he needs to remind himself what it feels like to exist as a separate entity to Will.

He steps past the foyer, into the vast arches of corridors branching from the atrium. There’s a room in here that would provide him with the perfect balm; something created when he was barely past his teens and released fresh upon the world. He strolls across the stone floor and hears his steps echoing. The door is near; it’s one of the first he ever forged. It’s iron, delicate filigree against heavier metal, the texture of it vivid beneath his fingers. He’s rummaging for the clasp of the lock, and he’s still hearing the echo of footfalls. They’re distant, as much as anything can have distance within the vast rooms of his mind, but they’re frantic. Stamping more than stepping, running more than walking. He tries the lock again, and it doesn’t move. He tries instead to imagine the interior, beyond the heavy door. Thinks of the rich greens of the garden, the sky perpetually half-clouded beneath the Lithuanian sun, the scent of hydrangea and peony.

The footsteps grow closer, as do the sounds of hands crashing against doors, of breathing, fast. Hannibal shunts at the metal door. If he can only step into the garden, he can retreat. He will be safe.

The footsteps grow shape, and there’s an outline to the form making them. It’s unmistakable, despite its nightmarish motion, and Hannibal accepts that the door will not yield to him; there is no longer any space that exists to him that doesn’t belong to Will.

He turns from the shape running toward him, a distortion and not a comfort, and flees.

•

Well into the fifty-sixth hour since the conversation with Alana, Georg's phone flashes. Once, for a picture message. The screen is small, and on first impression, the image appears as nothing more than a sequence of white and yellow flecks on a black background, with oddly placed lines. As Hannibal studies it, it takes form. It's a night view of the city, from a vantage point which reveals the window frame it was taken from, and the driveway beneath it – and a soft blue Cadillac. It's an ugly photograph, but expertly taken; the distant lights of the coast convey an outline as clear as any map. There's barely enough intermediate detail to align to the moonlit geography, but barely is better than nothing; compared to the view from their own villa, it's some miles west, and higher up, past the city limits.

It's a signal flare from Will, or it's a trap. Within minutes, Hannibal is dressed and on his motorbike, speeding to city's edge to find out which.

Chapter End Notes

The fic finale draws ever nearer! The next one will be a mammoth update, and I'm still tidying it up. Thank you so much for sticking with this (especially after such a lengthy break in the middle). Hope you enjoy what's still to come!

End Game

Chapter Summary

In which everything happens.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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By the time Hannibal finds the property marked by the pale blue Cadillac, dawn is breaking behind it in a thin gold line. He's exhausted, despite much of the searching having been conducted from his motorbike, but the promise of seeing Will again buoys him. He hopes, brightly, that Will's internment may have left him less precious about the thought of killing the women responsible for it. He's stood across the road, half hidden by palm tree trunks. He stares up at the front window – the one the photograph was taken from – hoping to see a vision in tiny shorts beckoning to him. His fingers reach into his pocket for the reassurance of his knife and before they can grip it, something very light and very fast bites at the side of his craning neck.

Hannibal's limbs are quick to fold, each ligament seeming to dissolve and every nerve misfiring, then dulling. He tries to form words. Instead, he lets out something like a groan, feels himself being dragged towards the road, and then, he can't feel anything at all.

•

Hannibal's eyes open slowly, to a white room. The details of the space do not assemble quickly; there's a haze over everything. Bright sunlight, open doorways, and a strong smell of plastic.

Hannibal is not uncomfortable. He is aware that he is seated, and when he tilts his head downwards, he sees that there are no restraints on him. Curious. He moves to reach for his knife – the one in his right pocket – and is irked to find that his hand remains limp on the wooden arm of the chair. He sees the source of the plastic odour, in the form of sheeting laid out on the floor, execution-ready. He tries again with his left hand, and remains utterly immobile.

"We took your knives," says Alana's voice, somewhere behind Hannibal.

Not being able to twist is somewhat disorientating, though it's the clenching of his neck that alerts him to the present of a needle, tucked into the muscle and likely keeping him connected to a stream of disabling chemicals. *Oh.*

“Are you ready to change your mind?” she asks, and something sounds off about her voice. There’s no heat to it, no movement.

Hannibal’s tongue feels heavy in his mouth, and forcing it into tidy words is difficult, though he rarely shies away from a challenge.

“My head is on the metaphorical chopping block,” he says. “A condemned man might confess to anything to change his fate.”

The room remains ominously still, baring the rustle of plastic sheeting.

“You don’t see yourself as condemned,” Alana’s voice tells him. “This is still an adventure to you.”

It is, and Hannibal wants to applaud her insight. More than that, he’s delighted that his influence has formed so great an aspect of their lives, that they should have devoted such thought to merely understanding him. He answers her, his mouth struggling to form a complete smile.

“Of course. I trust that Will is with you?”

Alana answers in the affirmative, which tells Hannibal that wherever they are, isn’t in the room with him.

“I would very much like to speak to him,” Hannibal understates. He hopes, emphatically, that Will is biding his time and preparing a magnificent retaliation. There would be no motivation for Will to harm either woman on the basis of a wrathful promise, but their current situation has moved the act of violence into a more urgent category. If Will only kills when he deems it to be *necessary*, then this scenario seems to be the only definition of the word.

“I’m sure you would,” Alana says. Then, “Shall we?”

There’s a click, and a stretched out silence. Minutes later, there’s a sound of footsteps on gravel, and a sound of something being dragged. The footsteps gain volume, hard heels against harder floors, and Alana enters the room.

“We needed to be sure you were incapacitated,” she explains, ducking back out of the room. She shuffles back in a moment later, dragging a loose-limbed Will by the shoulders. Margot supports some of the weight, nudges in a drip trolley, holding the line that runs from a pouch into the needle in Will’s neck. They position Will against the back wall, at the boundary of the plastic sheeting, sitting him down with outstretched legs, his hands dull and useless at his sides. Mercifully, he’s been provided with more clothes since Hannibal last saw him, and at least one opportunity to shower.

“It’s good to see you,” Hannibal says, addressing each person in the room unequally. Alana looks vivid; sharp angles and heels, and Margot beside her looks like the very spirit of vengeance incarnate; burnt oranges and rich reds, and a resolute expression. Both women reveal neat revolvers, Alana’s pulled from the hip of her trousers, Margot’s from the folds of her skirt.

Alana speaks, her voice level. “You still have the opportunity to make good on at least one of your promises, Hannibal.”

Margot follows the cue. “You could still save Will. It would be a shame to kill him.”

“You lied,” remarks Hannibal, his surprise – and admiration, at the raising of the stakes so late in the game – entirely genuine.

Will’s expression is not readily interpretable; there’s something like resignation, and something more vivid; a promise, perhaps. He remains silent.

Margot is nonchalant in her answer. “I imagine Will is as protective of you as I am of my wife, and as she is of me. You were very supportive of me getting away from vengeful, violent men,” she smiles. “Will isn’t exempt from this.” There’s a unity in the posture of the wives, in the way they maintain easy contact with each other, whilst not moving their eyes from Hannibal.

“Quite,” Hannibal agrees. Despite the elevated threat, he’s gratified that they are not daring to underestimate Will. He only wishes Will would find some way to act on their assertions.

Will remains mute. He shifts, slightly, and the tubing – trapped between his skull and the wall behind him – moves. It goes unnoticed by either woman.

Buoyed by this new advancement, Hannibal continues.

“I am pleased to see you taking hold of your own life so efficiently,” he tells Margot. “And I applaud your efforts.”

“I’m sure you do,” answers Margot, more disinterested than riled.

“I promised you the chance to retract your words, Hannibal,” Alana says. She sounds as though she’s urging him to rescind, though her posture indicates that she is ready for Hannibal’s pride to deny it. “To make things clear,” she says and her expression is electric, “whatever happens, we’re leaving this city with our son, and returning to our lives, undisturbed. Whether you live through this is up to you.”

Behind the women, Will slowly turns his ankles, enough to indicate that the needle is no longer in his neck and that his faculties are once again his own. There’s still a nagging doubt in Hannibal’s mind that Will has motives more wrapped in morality than their own survival, but he pushes it aside. He’s optimistic, and starting to enjoy himself. The possibility that he’s moments from embracing his own death is a significant one, but there’s no one he’d rather share the experience with.

“The old testament becomes you,” he tells Alana. “You want me to beg? I’m sure Margot enjoys having such an assertive partner. Perhaps we are more similar than you think.”

“You’re being vulgar,” Margot points out.

Undeterred, Hannibal continues. “Why not kill me when I was outside? You got a dart into me. It could just as easily have been a bullet. And Will, you could have killed days ago. Are

we feeling sentimental?”

“It seemed safer to have the two of you together,” Alana corrects. “Unmake the promise, and we’ll all walk away.” She raises the revolver, now angling it at Hannibal’s chest.

“You’ve gone to a great deal of effort,” he offers as a goad. The revolver may be poised, but he trusts implicitly that Alana is in no hurry to fire it. “It would be a shame to waste the opportunity.”

Alana opens her mouth, a rebuttal forming between her teeth. She’s interrupted by Will.

“You only promised to kill Alana,” Will says, his words scratched, “to punish her bravery.”

All eyes in the room track to Will as he unfurls, pushing himself up to a standing position. Both revolvers spin to face him, one aimed at his chest and the other trained on his skull. Will’s posture remains entirely passive, though he takes a measured step forward, until each gun is no more than a hand width away from him. Enough to indicate that he *could* retaliate, but he’s choosing not to.

Hannibal is gravely disappointed.

“The only reason that bravery was necessary,” Will continues, and he’s addressing the barrels of the guns as much as the people wielding them, “was because of my betrayal.”

“I assure you,” says Hannibal, “that my ire towards Alana existed entirely independently of you.”

Will takes another step, arms still loose at his side. Margot and Alana part to let him through, keeping the grip on their respective weapons firm, any surprise at Will’s emergence from the chemical restraints entirely concealed. He nods a discreet gesture of gratitude and, before he’s within reaching distance of Hannibal, he kneels.

If Hannibal had the strength to place his head in his hands in exasperation, he would. This is not how he desires supplication from Will.

“You wouldn’t take it back,” Will tells Hannibal. “Your pride means more to you than that.”

“No,” Hannibal agrees, the sense of repetition starting to grate. He hopes that Will may have followed his lead, and tucked some sharp implement in his shoes – that he’s only feigning his deference until the right moment to attack. Nothing indicates this to be the case, and so Hannibal begins to accept more fully that he may die today, after all.

“I don’t want to die,” Will says, and this is the sort of statement that generally precedes a caveat, a terrible decision, or both. “But you don’t owe your wrath to Alana. To Margot, or to their son. You owe it to *me*.”

Alana and Margot are both looking at Hannibal with something like expectation, though neither of them speak.

“Martyrdom suits you, Will,” Hannibal offers, gratefully accepting the wet-eyed, glowering stare Will offers him at that. “It is a great debt,” he adds in warning. He’s staring at Will’s face, trying to find a private message in the furrows of his brow, the rapid blinking away of moisture. There’s nothing he can read, beyond the fact that the gravity of Will’s plea seems to be causing him no small measure of distress. Perhaps, this is less of a game than he first thought.

The room feels too warm. Margot whispers something inaudible in Alana’s ear, and Alana offers a taut nod in response.

Will perseveres, the dampness in his eyes threatening to brim over: “Anything you would have done to them, you do to me instead.”

“I think he already has,” murmurs Alana.

“Would you accept it?” Will asks, the suppliant at the feet of Alana and Margot. His voice is both resolute and desperate, and Hannibal has never seen him so stunningly submissive. More than that, he’s sincere. There’s no edge to his request. It’s an honourable appeal, and it’s for lives that aren’t his own. As far as gestures go, it’s painfully true to Will’s nature. It’s made to every person in the room, and each of them must answer.

“Hannibal?” Alana prompts.

Hannibal’s personal sense of integrity seems lesser, when weighed against the gun now resting at Will’s temple. Alana’s motivations are not shaped by the same need for violence as his, though he now does not doubt that she will pull on the trigger and let Hannibal reap the idiocy of his actions, should he remain silent. This is a practicality, for her, and any softness she may once have felt for Will, any that Margot may have shared, has been wholly eclipsed by the promise of their futures. The women may be in love, but they do not share Hannibal’s concept of romance.

Hannibal feels entirely trapped. It is an unwelcome feeling, and it spurs him into speaking.

“In this moment, I do not believe that I could kill you,” Hannibal tells Will, watching his face fall. There’s nothing. A silence that stretches out for a breath too long, and the weight of expectation. Yet, there’s something in the way Will is looking at him, something utterly wretched and disappointed, that makes Hannibal think he’d want to earn that expression from him again. Perhaps, he can postpone their deaths after all.

“But,” Hannibal offers, “In this moment I do not have you at all. If this must be the cost of keeping you, I accept. And I will,” he says, eyes locked firmly on Will’s, “kill you.”

Alana’s face is unreadable. Margot looks away. Will’s expression is of a grave satisfaction, and relief.

Hannibal continues, tongue still heavy in his mouth, focusing on sculpting the words that will arrange their fates. “It will not be today, and unlikely tomorrow. But you have asked, and so your life, Will, is now forfeit. It is mine. And Alana,” Hannibal is careful to look at Alana as

he addresses her. “You and I will have no further business to conduct. I will make no further threat upon you or yours. Nor will I seek you out via any other agency I may have.”

Margot takes a small step back. Her expression is wary, but cold. Alana joins her, both stood behind Will, weapons still out.

“Though,” says Hannibal, the devil’s smile creeping back onto his face, “I am sorry that this means you don’t get to kill anyone today.”

Alana smiles at that, and Hannibal fears that his words have been predictable.

“I’m sure you are, Hannibal,” she says, and her free arm finds Margot’s waist. Neither of the revolvers move. “You have no further disclaimers, concessions to announce?” she asks.

“None,” agrees Hannibal.

“Thank you,” whispers Will.

“Then goodbye,” Alana tells him.

“Goodbye, Hannibal,” follows Margot, sounding more tired than regretful. “Bye, Will.” She rests a hand on Will’s shoulder.

“The drip should keep going for another hour or so,” Alana says. Hannibal doesn’t question why she’s telling him of time limits when the next logical step is surely for them to take their leave immediately, and for Will to unhook him from the wretched cocktail of muscle relaxants and anaesthesia.

In answer, Alana palms the revolver, and smacks it in a short swing into the back of Will’s head.

Will pitches forward, a limp weight. Alana and Margot move him in synchronicity, communicating prompts to each other as they straighten out his limbs and check the path of his airways is clear.

“Was that necessary?” Hannibal asks, not without accusation.

Will is an almost tidy sprawl at his feet, eyes closed with the dark bliss of unconsciousness.

Alana doesn’t answer until she and Margot are at the room’s exit.

“A precautionary measure,” she says, and her smile is brilliant. “I don’t share your hunger for violence, if that’s what you mean.”

It is *exactly* what Hannibal means, and it requires no elaboration from either party. And then, he’s alone; not including the unconscious figure at his feet.

Through the dull haze of chemicals, realisation is relatively slow to reach Hannibal. When it does, it’s disarming: everything that has led him here has been a spectacular manipulation, to allow so little bloodshed. The scope of Will’s influence within this is something that will

have to remain a mystery until the resting figure below him gains lucidity. Either way, Hannibal is unable to fight the notion that he has been entirely bested by each person in the room, though the outcome of it may not be wholly terrible.

Which raises the next line of thought, one which Hannibal imagines will sustain him at least until Will wakes up, or his chemical drip runs out: he has no intention of reneging on his newly made dire promise. It won't be soon, he hopes. But the means and methods, the potentials within those words are endless, and enthralling.

•

They arrive back at the villa, sticky from sweat and heavy with the residue of chemicals in their bloodstreams.

There is much to talk about, though not all of what needs to be said can be communicated with words. And so, they cross the threshold, close the door behind them – listening past the sound of breathing to ensure that they are truly alone – and Hannibal pulls Will close to him. Will pulls in return, until they form a single body of heat, skin and clothing knotted in the tightest grip of an embrace. Truthfully, they both smell awful. And yet, Hannibal nestles his nose in Will's hair, immersing his senses in sweat and petrol and the residues of unfamiliar soap. Will's breath is warm against his ear and his grip is fierce. It is not the grasp of someone who has endured torment, as Hannibal has these last lonely days. Rather, it is the hold of someone who has found the thing he wants most in the world and has an intrinsic need to *possess* it. Hannibal does not think he has ever been held in such a way, until now.

"I wouldn't have let them kill you," Will says, his voice a whisper in Hannibal's ear.

Hannibal thinks he knew this, even moments from his promised death, waiting for a violent retaliation from Will that never emerged. As though Will could have outsmarted two bullets, if only to prove he could. He still finds himself surprised, by Will's assertion, and by his own capacity to still be surprised.

"And yet," Hannibal says, renewing the hold on Will with fresh purpose "you still chose to give your life to me."

Something thrills inside Hannibal as he speaks the words aloud. The promise of being able to take life from Will has never eluded him, even if the desire to do so has waned. But it being gifted to him, wholly and sincerely, is something altogether different. He has never felt more godlike.

"Consider it proof of what we already knew," Will says, his fingernails digging through the thin cloth of Hannibal's shirt. "I could never die at anyone's hands but yours."

Even through the lingering remnants of chemical restraints, Will is thickening against Hannibal's thighs. Hannibal's soft euphoria at Will's quietly spoken words is having a more

nebulous effect on him; every cell in his body feels restless and dizzy. He moves, then; pushes against Will to steer the twines of their limbs to the edge of the vast room. He catches the swell of Will's lower lip in his teeth and draws blood to the surface, and is caught in return by Will's teeth. Then, it's a kiss, but no less aggressive; air caught in hurried gasps and fingers grappling with hair, with skin, with clothing made damp through heat and urgent appetite. Will's back hits the wall and it signals a pause, just long enough to draw breath before Will's mouth is at Hannibal's jaw and his hands are prying at the fastening of Hannibal's trousers.

Submitting to Will like this would be easy – if not inevitable – were it not for the knowledge that this is not the role Hannibal wishes for himself in this moment, nor would it honour all that Will has given him.

He snakes his forearm into the space beneath Will's chin, and presses against his trachea. Will's mouth softens, open, his hands scrabbling for purchase and missing. It doesn't take much pressure for Will's face to grow red, and for his attempts to pry Hannibal's arm from his throat to grow more strength.

"Would you choose the manner of your demise?" asks Hannibal, his voice low and lethal. He has no intention of killing Will in this moment, nor does he imagine that Will has any desire to die. "A promise is a promise, after all."

Will's eyes are wide, his breath desperate and short, and his dick visibly rigid. Hannibal suspects there may have been more to his bargain with the wives than mere preservation.

"*Not – like – this,*" Will rasps, and there's a devil's smile on his lips, vivid through the duress.

Hannibal eases the pressure against Will's windpipe in mere millimetres. Enough to keep their position sustainable, and to discourage Will from forming a more effective retaliation. The barriers between genuine threat and gameplay are barely present, though this may well be the point.

Will is reaching again, this time for the remaining closed buttons of Hannibal's trousers. With only one hand free, there's little Hannibal can do to stop him. He has no desire to break the tension by finding more efficient means of limiting Will's movements, so he improvises.

The fist to Will's gut creates a brief but thorough pause. Will sags, reaches for breath instead of for Hannibal, and those few beautiful seconds are sufficient to drive him to the ground. He's shoulders to the floor before he's breathing fully again, still dazed as Hannibal positions himself astride Will's hips, knuckles crushing beneath Hannibal's knees.

"Tell me, Will. How should I kill you?"

Will is pressed painfully close against Hannibal, and his eyes are a storm. His words aren't forthcoming; buffered by his hesitance to speak his most absolute truths. Hannibal works on Will's inhibitions in the ways he knows best, drawing light fingertips down Will's stomach and threatening friction that he has no intention of giving readily. When Will writhes beneath the too-soft touching, Hannibal turns his teasing into pinches, into twists of the skin on Will's groin, and then his nipples.

“I would love to hear your ideas,” Hannibal says, stiffening at the low howl from Will’s throat at the pain of it. “Perhaps I should bury you alive,” he offers as a prompt, “as you’re so keen to pitch yourself into the waiting earth.” He hadn’t intended it to be an eroticised notion, and yet Will’s cheeks flush livid and his tongue lingers between his lips. Hannibal resolves to never again underestimate Will’s ability to fetishize his own suffering.

“Speared by antlers,” Wills says, too quickly. “Mounted, and bled out for you.”

Hannibal doesn’t have opportunity to reply, to say that this penetrative fantasy is too easy a bait for a psychiatrist; any oxygen needed by his cognitive faculties has had its flow fully diverted.

“I’ve thought about it,” Will continues, his voice slowing and the burn of humiliation etched into his skin at confessing it. “Since I first saw you, before I knew it was you I was seeing.”

Hannibal’s touch turns generous, at this.

“Deer are not indigenous to this country,” Hannibal says, “we may need to compromise, when the time comes.”

Hannibal has no desire for the time to come before they move on from this place, nor for any time soon after that. He is also beginning to fully appreciate Will’s need for fear, and for the arousal he experiences when confronting the imminence of his death. And in this, he understands what Will needs from him. And, of what else he wants to take from Will.

“Though I am fond of the thought of you impaled,” Hannibal says, crawling further up Will’s chest until the crotch of his trousers nests against Will’s chin. He scoops, and frees his dick; rests it against the side of Will’s jaw. Will is smarting from the indignity, though he opens his mouth. Hannibal trusts that Will is not cruel enough to fight back with his teeth.

“I had wanted you on my table,” Hannibal says, and Will is barely holding himself together beneath him. The angle is difficult, and yet Will’s tongue finds him. There’s a roughness to the warmth, but Will is careful, gentle, almost. The top of his mouth wraps around the head, and it’s not enough for Hannibal to feel submerged; he’s balancing, now, one hand on the wall in front of him and the other grounding himself as he tries to lower himself, in, closing his thighs around Will.

“Served, a morsel at a time,” Hannibal continues, trying to hold himself in, “until your ribs were bare and your heart held no more blood to pump.”

Will’s hot, wet mouth yields. It takes all strength known to Hannibal not to collapse onto Will as he lets himself come, hard and gasping; his knuckles are white and his legs shudder, rubberised and near useless.

Will’s attempts to swallow are valiant but ineffective; his throat clenches and he’s coughing, and his cheeks are splashed. Hannibal kisses him, tastes himself on Will’s skin, and crawls backwards, resting his weight across Will’s thighs with his palms pressing hard on his hips.

Will is leaking, and Hannibal doesn't dare breathe too close to him lest it provides the trigger for his release. Hannibal may be sated, but the scenarios he wants to paint for Will are multitudinous. He's ready to speak again, to offer new threats of lips stitched tight, of starvation, of a thousand cuts, of drowning. He's swiftly derailed.

"How would you serve it?" Will asks, his whole body held in a low tremble and his voice wet and rasping. "My heart."

Hannibal's answer is instinctive and immediate.

"Raw."

Will's answering groan is guttural. Hannibal's hands are on him, and Will spills into them, stuttering and gasping. Open mouthed, debased, he reaches to Hannibal. Hannibal allows himself to fall into the loose-limbed grasp, to lay his sticky hands on Will and to let the floor hold them.

This villa, with its too white walls and memories etched into the floorboards in sweat, is no longer home. It's served its purpose, in that it's provided the stage on which they could transition into their newest lives. And so, Hannibal guts the space for the few things he wants to take with them, much of it fitting inside a generously sized case. Will's clothes take up little space, and leave ample room for the many gifts Hannibal has acquired for him. The collar, and its spike, are laid atop.

"That will probably invite some questions if we go through any kind of customs," Will says, loading a second case with perishable goods. If they are travelling by boat, they will need their sustenance.

"Which your scars will be able to answer," Hannibal says, sealing the case and casting a lingering stare at Will's jaw, and the pinkish gap in stubble at the bottom of his chin.

Will mirrors Hannibal's stare, gaze resting on the barely visible pendant beneath his shirt, the one containing the tooth wrenched from his jaw. They each wear each other, in scars and in bone. Will arranges a fourth bottle of rum amongst the supplies, wrapped in cloth so as not to damage the three flasks of wine, one of each colour.

"The journey is unlikely to last more than a week," Hannibal tells him. "I am certain there will be plenty more when we reach our destination."

"It's good rum," Will offers as explanation.

For all that Will has gifted him, and for all he has endured, Hannibal does not begrudge him a crutch. He'd rather see him standing, after all.

Will has spoken very little of his time away from Hannibal, only to say that he was treated well, with a gentle sort of detachment. Will had laughed at Hannibal's disappointment, with a

loose and gentle mirth as rare as summer snow. Will had assured him, still smiling, that the means of transport at least had been unpleasant; that midsummer heat is no temperature to spend bundled in the trunk of a car. Satisfied that no events had taken place that would need to be reclaimed, Hannibal had left it alone, and asked nothing of the conversations that may have taken place over those few days, though curiosity itches at him.

Their rental car sits ready, beyond the front door. It's only a short drive to the port, but that hadn't deterred Hannibal from renting a vintage Mercedes for the journey.

"The trunk looks to be quite spacious," Hannibal says pleasantly, letting Will drag the cases to the rear of the car. "It might even be comfortable," he suggests when Will fails to rise to the bait.

"No," Will answers, advancing on Hannibal and undeterred by the fact they're in the open, now. "Not if you want me to sail you to Cuba." Will's hands are at Hannibal's waist and his mouth is at his jaw before Hannibal can fully draw breath. "And you won't kill me while we're on the boat," he says, breath tickling at Hannibal's hair, "if you want to make shore."

He pauses, for a moment; mouth wet and curved, his body fitted close against Hannibal's.

"Awful boy," Hannibal murmurs into Will's waiting mouth, pulling a kiss from him.

When he pulls back, it's only far enough to give his words space to breathe. Will's flirtation with the concept of his own death is charming, but the flippancy of it is unnerving. There are still gaps in Hannibal's understanding, and he has a keen desire to see them filled.

"Tell me honestly, what inspired you to offer your life?"

Will smiles, unphased. "You know this, Hannibal –"

Hannibal steels his grip on Will, wordlessly communicating his renewed intolerance for cryptic, playful answers. The levity drops from Will's expression, and the smile that remains is sharp.

"No one had to die," he says simply. "You were never going to back down," he says without accusation. "Killing them, wasn't...necessary. There was another way."

Hannibal's grip softens, but his words don't.

"You say 'no one' had to die. But you will."

Will pulls him closer, at that. "And I'm sure you'll find a way to use that to our advantage," Will says.

There's the thinnest scent of excitement emanating from Will, and a spark of clarity follows. The night of the storm plays vivid in Hannibal's mind as he recalls the specific cues of Will's release; the imagined gunshot, with the barrel buried deep inside him. Will's need, not just to *hurt*, but to have his suffering wrenched from him, laid out bloodied and splintered and breathless.

Any inclination Hannibal may have felt to reassure Will, to tell him that his death lies years hence, or sooner only if he tries to leave, remains unspoken. Will appears to need this, as deeply as Hannibal needs Will to be *his*.

“This does rather remove an element of safety from our proclivities,” Hannibal says, and he’s got one hand in Will’s hair, toying at the roots and tugging the curls about his fist if only because he *can*, and because he has yet to tire of the soft *ah* sounds that Will lets slip when he’s caught off guard in this way.

“There’s never been an *element of safety*, Hannibal. Or even a whisper of it.”

Will doesn’t need to add that this is the very reason he’s with Hannibal, and Hannibal doesn’t need to voice his agreement. He answers instead with his teeth, biting hard into the side of Will’s neck and drinking in the sounds of welcomed surprise. He smothers Will’s gasps with a kiss, hot and blood-tipped.

“Then,” he says, extricating himself from his grasp and opening the passenger door for Will. “I hope you’ll embrace the atrocities I intend to make of you.”

Will’s answering smile is a knife that Hannibal is gifting his pulsing heart to.

“I’m sure we will,” Will says.

Their new life awaits, carrying renewed vows of brutality, and the beauty of it has never felt more infinite.

Chapter End Notes

I swear this is the most romantic thing I've ever written. Thank you, for reading this - and the hugest of thank yous for the little reminders that people are enjoying this - they've sustained me through a lot more than just writing. Also, sorry about all the tooth stuff. Big love <3

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